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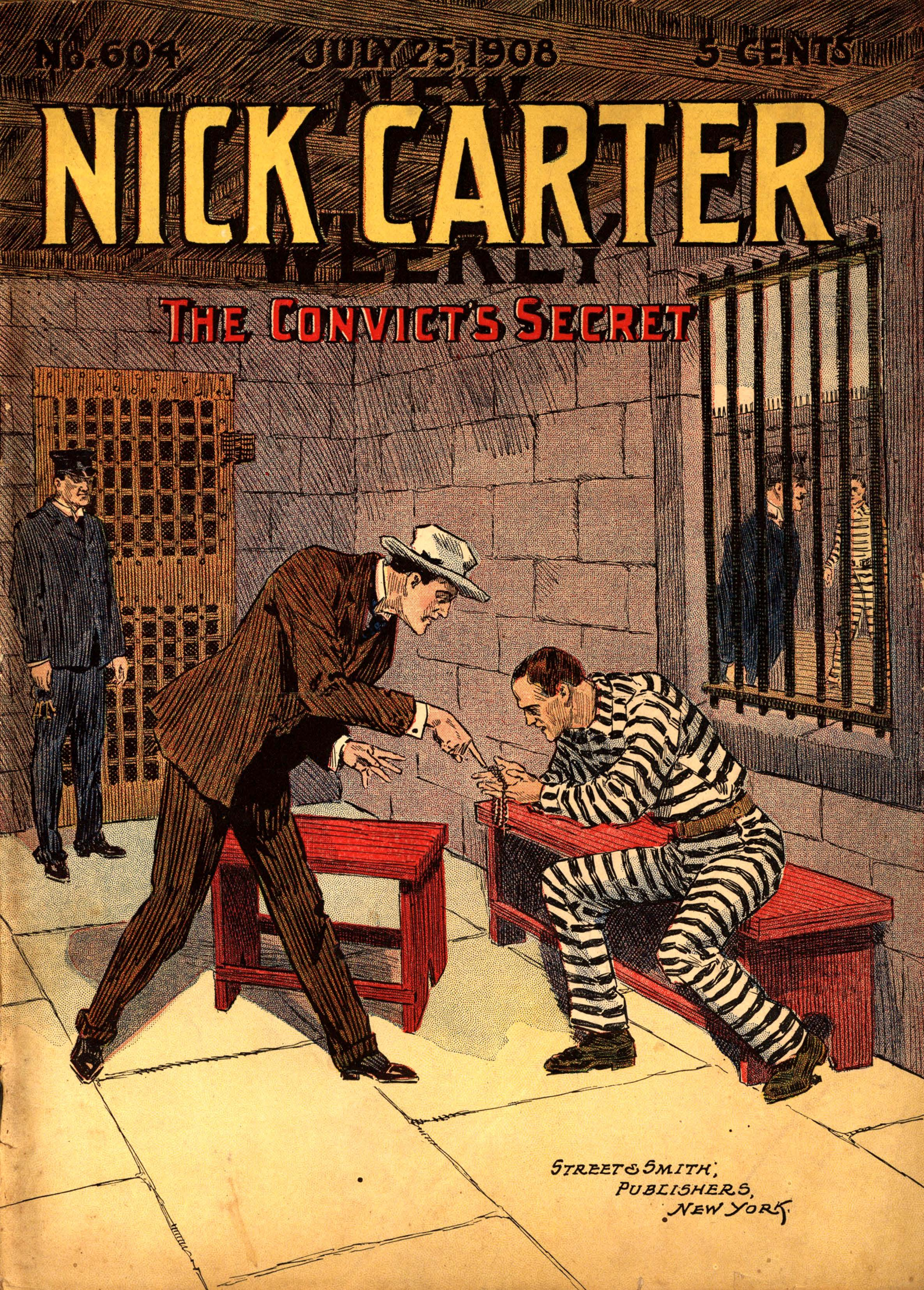
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE CONVICT'S SECRET



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THE CONVICT'S SECRET;

OR,

NICK CARTER ON THE TRAIL OF FACTS.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE.

Nick Carter and his friend Conroy Conner were walking together along Pennsylvania Avenue in the city of Washington. They had just left the Capitol, descended through the spacious grounds that surround it and were crossing Four-and-a-half Street when the incident occurred which is the reason for this story.

The detective had just returned from an extended stay in Japan where he had gone on a special mission for the State Department. He had arrived in Washington the preceding afternoon to make his report to the secretary, which accounts for his presence in the capital city at that particular time. He had remained over one day in order to visit with his very good friend, Conroy Conner, attached to the United States secret service, with whom many of us are already well acquainted.

They were smoking their cigars and strolling along quietly with no particular destination in view, the time being shortly after three o'clock in the afternoon. It was the intention of the detective to take the midnight train out of town for home, and the two had arranged to dine together at the Willard, and then to attend the theater, after which Conner was to accompany Nick to the station.

So much for the "best laid plans of mice and men."

They had crossed Four-and-a-half Street and Nick Carter was in the act of stepping upon the curb at the upper side of the street when his attention was arrested by something that he discovered lying half-concealed among the dust and refuse that had accumulated in the gutter.

He stooped and picked it up, discovering on the instant what he supposed to be a rosary, such as all devout catholics possess.

"What is it, Nick?" asked Conner, glancing idly toward his friend.

"Some person has lost a rosary, that's all," replied the detective; and he let the long string of beads fall in a mass into the palm of his left hand after which he thrust both hands again into the side pockets of his coat and continued the conversation that had absorbed their attention before the interruption.

While they walked along together Nick played idly with the string of beads that he held in his left hand, still inside the pocket; played with them unthinkingly as one will do under such circumstances. It would have been the same had the article he held been a bunch of keys or any other object which he happened to grasp at the moment.

Both had in effect forgotten the incident by the time they arrived at the entrance to the Hotel Raleigh, although the detective was still fingering the string of beads, closing his fingers upon them, and then allowing them to glide from his hand to the bottom of his pocket after which he each time recovered them again and repeated the performance.

Before the entrance to the hotel Conner paused.

"Nick," he said, "let's preempt a couple of those easy chairs in the hotel office and smoke a fresh cigar. We must have walked four or five miles since we started out, and I am tired. Let's rest a while. What do you say?"

"I'm willing," replied the detective, smiling. "I believe that strolling along in that aimless manner, as we have been doing, will tire a man more than four or five times the distance where energy and fixed purpose are concerned in it."

"That's no idle dream, either," responded Conner; and so they entered the hotel together and sought two of the leather-covered chairs in the social-hall beyond the office, where they could look out through the window upon the street while they continued their talk.

They lighted fresh cigars; and in applying a match to his own, Nick brought forth the chain of beads again, and they trickled through his fingers as he did so, until the entire string was scattered across his knees leaving only the cross that was attached to it still in his hand, for that had caught between his first and second fingers.

Conroy Conner is a catholic, and a devout one, and his attention was attracted toward the beads at once.

"Let me see the rosary you found, Nick," he said. "I had forgotten all about it."

"So had I, although I have been fingering it inside my pocket ever since I picked it up," replied the detective; and he passed it over to his friend. "I'm not a catholic, Con, but I have seen rosaries before now. It strikes me that this one is unusually long, isn't it?"

Conner did not reply.

He was gazing upon the article he now held in his hand, with an expression that it would have been difficult to describe.

Surprise, wonder, amazement, and incredulity were about equally mixed in that expression, and for a considerable time he studied the string of beads in utter silence.

Finally he exclaimed:

"I say, Nick, this thing is no rosary. At least, it is not at all like any one that I ever saw, with the single exception that it has a cross attached to it. I don't know what it is, old man."

"Eh?" replied the detective. "Not a rosary, Con?"

"I don't think so. It certainly isn't at all like any that I have ever seen."

"It certainly looks like a rosary to me."

"That is because you are not a catholic. If you were, you would recognize the difference as I have done. Almost any string of small, black beads, arranged in divisions and bearing a cross would look to you like a rosary. Not so to me."

"Why not?"

"A rosary should be divided into decads, paternosters, and glorias. This string of beads is not, therefore it is not a rosary. At least, it is not a Dominican, or a catholic rosary. I'm dead sure of that."

"Then what is it?"

"Just a string of beads. That's all."

"But it is separated into divisions."

"So I see."

"Possibly it is a rosary, after all; one that belongs to some branch of the church with which you are not familiar. It might be——"

"No; that is impossible, Nick. A rosary is a rosary. It cannot be anything else, nor can anything else represent a rosary."

"Possibly there are other churches that use them, and this one may be——"

"That is utterly impossible, Nick. A rosary has but one language, and that is the language of the New Testament, no matter in what tongue it happens to be told. I know. I am a catholic, and a good one, I hope, although I might be better, I suppose."

"Let me have a look at it," said the detective, reaching out his hand and receiving the string of beads that had suddenly assumed such absorbing interest for them both.

For a moment he held it suspended in his hand, gazing at it fixedly. Then suddenly he bent forward eagerly.

Then, holding the cross in his left hand he pulled the beads slowly along between the thumb and first finger of his right until the entire string had passed thus in review before him, from the right side of the cross around the circle to the left side of it.

Conner watched him with interest not unmixed with impatience, for he saw plainly that the detective had made some sort of a discovery; he could not imagine what it was.

But Nick made no remark.

Instead he repeated the operation of passing the beads slowly along between his fingers, but when he had completed the circuit the second time he dropped the whole mass into his left hand, and, leaning forward, sat staring out through the window, apparently at nothing.

"Well?" said Conner, at last, with some show of impatience. "Have you made some sort of a discovery, Nick?"

"Yes," absently.

"Might one venture to inquire what it is?"

"One might."

"When you are quite ready to impart——"

"You never learned telegraphy, did you, Con?" the detective interrupted him.

"No. I never did."

"Nor the Morse alphabet?"

"No."

"I suppose you know enough about it to understand that it is represented by a certain arbitrary arrangement of dots, dashes, and spaces; eh?"

"Yes. I have heard that much about it."

"Well, Con, that is precisely what this supposed rosary happens to be."

"Eh? What does it happen to be? I don't understand."

"It is a message, Con, spelled out in the Morse alphabet, and made to represent a rosary, or, rather, to look so nearly like one that only a close inspection would reveal the fact that it is not. We have already experienced the significance of that fact."

"By Jove, Nick! Do you mean to tell me——"

"I have already told you what it is, Con."

"Can you read the message?"

"Certainly."

"You have read it; eh?"

"I have read it through twice, in order to make sure about it."

"What is it? What *is* the message, Nick? Who is it addressed to, and——"

"It isn't addressed to anybody, Con. It is merely a message, and rather a puzzling one at that."

"Aren't you going to tell me what it is?"

"Yes. Of course."

"Well, get busy. I'm gradually turning into an animated interrogation point already."

"How many beads should a real rosary contain, Con?"

"Say two hundred. That is, a complete one."

"Well, there are three hundred and forty-three here, not counting the links between them, which form the spaces in the Morse alphabet. I have assumed that the larger beads here represent the short dashes, and that the largest ones represent the long dash for the letter L. By working on that basis, I am able to read the message."

"Will you please tell me what it is you are able to read there, Nick? I'm getting impatient."

"Pardon me, Con. I have had no intention of trying your patience in the least. The surprise of the thing has made me forgetful. The message, as I read it, is this:

"'Carriage appointed place eleven to-night, Zara'—that is doubtless a name—'inside. Philip disposed of safely. No risks now. Bring jewels and cash. No turning back. Keep promises. Trust me or death for both.'"

"Is that all, Nick?"

"Yes. That is all. It strikes me that it is a great deal, too. What mystery is here, Con? Eh? What sort of a mystery do you suppose is concealed in the words of that message?"

CHAPTER II.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MESSAGE.

Conner stretched forth a tentative hand and took the strange string of beads. Then he examined it with care, as if he, too, would read the message that Nick had discovered there.

"I wish, before we discuss the message itself, you would tell me just how you happened to discover it," he said.

"Well," replied the detective, "when you announced so emphatically that the thing was *not* a rosary I became at once possessed with the idea that it was intended to imitate one. That is, that it was made so that it would sufficiently resemble a rosary to be mistaken for one at a casual glance."

Conner nodded.

"If that were so," continued the detective, "it followed naturally that there should be a much deeper significance to it than appeared on the surface. Nobody would take the trouble to manufacture an article like that for the mere pleasure of imitating a rosary; and again the imitation was not good; it was not sufficiently exact to even pretend to be a counterfeit."

"That's as true as you're alive, Nick."

"So, when I took the thing in my hand, after you returned it to me, I began to wonder what it really was made for, anyhow."

Conner nodded comprehendingly again.

"It so happens, Con, that the first word of the message told by these beads, is almost entirely made up of dots and spaces. There are only three letters in the word that contain a dash, and——"

"What has that got to do with it?" Conner interrupted him.

"This: If the first word had been made up of dashes, I would not have been apt to see it, at least, not without considerable study. I will endeavor to explain. I have already told you that I assumed that the large beads represent the short dashes and the largest ones stand for the long dash, which is the letter L."

"Well?"

"If the first word was such a word as *lamb,* for example, it would have been represented by a long dash, a dot and dash, two short dashes, and a dash and three dots. The slight difference in the sizes of the beads would have meant nothing to me then. But as it happened, the first word is *carriage,* which, without mentioning the longer spaces between each letter, is written with two dots space dot, dot dash, dot space two dots, dot space two dots, two dots, dot dash, two short dashes dot, and dot. That spells carriage, Con."

"Does it? Glad you told me about it."

"While I sat here looking at the thing, those letters gradually formed themselves in my gaze and I got as far as c-a-r-r-i-a, and stopped; but I skipped the next letter and went to the single dot, which is E. Of course I at once realized that the letter I had skipped was G; and what was more important, I saw that the middle-sized bead represented a short dash."

"I see. I see."

"The next word happens also to be made up almost entirely of dots and spaces. It is *appointed.* Dot dash, five dots, five dots, dot space dot, two dots—and so on, so it was easy to read and it also helped me out on my theory."

"Sure."

"In the succeeding word, *place,* there is an L. Five dots, long dash, and so on. See?"

"Yes."

"Well, I found the largest-sized bead representing the letter L, and so I had a key to the entire problem."

"It was very clever of you, Nick."

"No; it was entirely an accident, and because of the fact that I understood telegraphy."

"You found the message, anyhow."

"Yes; and easily read it through to the end, once I discovered the key."

He raised the beads again and called Conner's attention more directly to them.

"If you will notice," he continued, "you will see that the arrangement has been very cleverly made. The beads are connected with one another by very small steel links. The spaces between letters are formed by two such links; the spaces between words are formed by three such links; but the spaces between dots to form a letter—such as the letter O, which is dot space dot—are made with one link. Understand?"

"Perfectly."

"So, once on the right track, the rest was easy."

"I think the whole circumstance a remarkable one, Nick."

"So do I. Remarkable is hardly the word, either. It is amazing."

"That brings us back again to the message itself, doesn't it?"

"Yes, Con, it does."

"What do you make of it all, Nick?"

"Just what the message says; no more."

"But why should it have been written—if I may abuse the word—in such an outlandish way?"

"That is exactly what I am asking myself."

"And how did it find its way into the gutter against the curb at the corner of Four-and-a-half Street and the avenue?"

"As for that," replied the detective, "that corner was doubtless the appointed place for the carriage, or, at least, the carriage must have stopped there, or the persons who were to meet it passed that spot on their way."

"Then the appointment must have been for last night; not for to-night; eh?"

"Without doubt."

"Then if the whole thing refers to a crime, the crime has already been committed. That would follow, wouldn't it?"

"I should suppose that it would."

"Do you think, Nick, that we ought to take the matter up?" asked Conner, after a short pause.

"I am going to take it up whether we really *ought* to do so or not. It is interesting, and it so happens that I have nothing on hand to hurry me just now. I like a puzzling proposition of this sort, and I'm going to try to work this one out to a solution."

"I'm with you, Nick."

"Good. It's a blind case, though."

"You bet. Give me another look at those beads, Nick."

Conner took them in his hand and studied them attentively for several moments. Then he remarked:

"The thing is beautifully made, Nick."

"So it is. I noticed that."

"Just wait a moment until I compare it with my own rosary;" and Conner fished down inside his collar as if a bug of some kind had lodged there, but presently he produced his own beads of decads, paternosters, and glorias. Then he placed them side by side and they compared the two.

"I thought so," said Conner, at last.

"Thought what, Con?"

"Why, that telegraphic message was made by a man who also knows how to manufacture a genuine rosary."

"I think there is no doubt of that. I have not thought there was from the first."

"That narrows our search for the origin of it, somewhat, doesn't it?"

"Possibly. I am not at all sure as to that. Do you happen to know of any man in Washington who manufactures such articles, Con?"

The secret service officer threw back his head and laughed heartily. Then deliberately he restored his own possession to its place around his neck, after which he said:

"Hardly, Nick. Such things are not purchasable commodity, you know. A rosary is procured from the priest who blesses it in a ceremony not unlike the baptismal service. But, of course, there are men in every large city who manufacture them. What I meant to suggest by my remark was this: I will call upon Father O'Shaughensy—I'll take you with me if you care to go; eh?"

"I should like very much to go there with you."

"Then we will call on him together and tell him the whole story. He will be as indignant as I am that the semblance, even such a poor one, of a rosary should have been used for such a purpose; and you may rely upon it that he will do everything in his power to suggest any possible source from which this thing was derived. I've got a hunch that he can help us, too."

"I begin to think so, too, Con. Anyhow, we will call upon him. But, my friend, it is not so much who made the telegraphic code message as the person to whom it was delivered, that we are interested in."

"One is likely to point the way to the other, don't you think?"

"Possibly. Perhaps probably. And yet, has it occurred to you that the person who manufactured this string of beads may not even know the meaning that he wrought there with the dots and dashes and spaces?"

"No; such a thing has not occurred to me."

"It has to me. Suppose, for instance, that you are an expert in this particular craft. You do not understand telegraphy. But I go to you with a design carefully drawn out on paper—like this."

The detective produced his pencil and on the back of an envelope made a series of dots and spaces, and a larger dot to represent the short dash which forms part of the letter A, and two of them as used in the letter G, forming the word carriage, thus:

"‥ . .- . ‥ . ‥ ‥ .- --. ."

"Now," he continued, "if you were a person who manufactured such things and I should take such a design to you and ask you to make it for me after the pattern I supplied, you would do so without question, and it would probably never occur to you that the design I had made actually spelled words."

"I understand you, Nick."

"So you see that after all the man who made the string of beads may not be able to assist us to any very great extent. It might be that he could direct us to the person who gave the order, but more than likely that person would have taken precautions against permitting his identity to be known."

"It will do no harm to make the effort."

"No. Certainly not."

"But, as you say, it is the person to whom the message was delivered, that we want to discover. And for the life of me, Nick, I haven't an idea where we are to look for such a person."

"Nor I—more than is suggested by the beads themselves."

"Eh? What do you mean by that?"

"Well, it is evident that the message was sent to some one who was prevented from receiving a message in any other form; to a person who might receive a rosary, or to whom a rosary might be passed, without suspicion. For instance, to a vonvict in a prison, or to some person in an institution of some kind where the attendants do not know any more about a rosary than I did a moment ago, but——"

"I see. I see. That's the idea, all right, Nick."

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY IN A NAME.

The two detectives left the hotel presently and walked on up the avenue, but when they drew near to the *Washington Post* building Nick turned aside and entered it without having mentioned his purpose in doing so to his companion.

But Conner knew the ways of the detective so well that he said not a word, but followed him to one of the side desks where Nick wrote rapidly for a moment, and then crossed the floor to the advertising window.

The advertisement that he handed in was as follows:

"ROSARY: One not made exactly according to rule was found in the gutter at the corner of Four-and-a-half Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. The owner may receive the same by addressing the undersigned at this office, and supplying a description of the same, and by giving an address to which it may be forwarded. ROSARY."

Nick purposely held the advertisement so that Conner could read it, before he passed it to the advertising clerk; and having paid for three insertions, the two turned away together, and went out again upon the street.

"I call that a clever ad, Nick," said the secret service officer, smiling, when they were again upon the street; and the detective nodded.

"The person who lost it," continued Conner, "will naturally wish to recover it, and——"

"It is the person who *sent* it who will be the most anxious to recover it," said Nick.

"Well, in any case, they will want to find it again, and inasmuch as you have opened a way for either of them to do so under an assumed name and by giving a false address, it is more than likely that one or both of them will fall into the trap."

"That is the way I figured it out."

"Still——"

"Con, I do not put much faith in the effort. A person who would think of such a slick method of transmitting a message will likely enough be much too slick himself to fall into the very palpable trap we have laid there; but it can do no harm to make the effort."

"And you have said nothing to make either of them suppose it is anything else *than* a rosary."

"Exactly. Shall we make that call upon the father, now?"

"That is where I am heading."

"Good. You have a personal acquaintance with him, I suppose."

"Sure I have that."

They were fortunate in finding the good father disengaged. He conducted them to his study where Nick at once stated the object of their call, and described in detail the discovery they had made, ending the recital by producing the beads and passing them over.

Father O'Shaughensy received the handful of beads with an expression that was a mingling of a frown and a smile; but he became interested the moment his eyes fell directly upon them; and as Nick had done in the beginning, he fell to studying the arrangement of them at once.

Nick and Conner remained silent for both could see that the good father already had some idea regarding the origin of the thing and they preferred to let him think it out in his own way.

Presently, still without offering any verbal comment, he rose and crossed the room to a small safe from an inside drawer of which he procured a genuine rosary. Then from still another drawer he took a second one, after which he stepped into the bay window of the room where the light was much sharper and there for a long time he remained in silence, comparing them and studying them.

When at last he left the window he went first to the safe and returned the two genuine rosaries to the receptacles from which he had taken them; and having done that and closed the safe again, he resumed his chair vis-à-vis with his two callers.

"I think, Mr. Carter," he said calmly, "that I can render you some assistance, though not much. I am, for instance, quite certain of the identity of the person who manufactured that message that is written with beads."

"You are?" exclaimed Nick, in surprise. This was much more than he had dared to hope for.

"Yes; but as I warned you a moment ago, I doubt if the knowledge will be of much benefit to you in your search."

"I understand you, sir; but I will be glad to hear what you *can* tell me," replied the detective.

"I believe that I can assure you positively that this string of beads was manufactured by a man whose name is Michael Cashel. That man was excommunicated—I suppose you understand what that means?"

"Yes, sir."

"He was excommunicated three years ago—it happened in Chicago, not here—and is now, according to the best of my knowledge and information, serving out a sentence of imprisonment at Moyamensing prison, in the State of Pennsylvania."

"Indeed, sir! You recognized his handiwork, I suppose?"

"Yes; almost at once. But I verified it by comparison with other work of his that I happen to have in my possession."

"I understand."

"There are certain characteristics about his work that are unmistakable, Mr. Carter. He was a master at his craft."

"May I ask what the full term of his sentence was, sir?"

"He was sentenced to five years, I believe."

"And how much of that time has he already served?"

"Approximately two years. Rather more than that, I think."

Nick was silent, and after a moment the father continued:

"It would appear, it seems to me, that either this string of beads was manufactured before he was sent to prison, or that he has been released or has made his escape from the place."

"Yes," agreed Nick, "unless he was permitted to do the work inside the prison. However, it can readily be ascertained whether he is still a prisoner there or not."

"You would telegraph to the warden of the prison, I suppose, Mr. Carter?"

"Or telephone—yes, sir."

"You may make use of my telephone, if you wish, at once. I confess to you that I am very much interested myself, to know whether the man is at liberty again or not."

"Thank you. Then I will do so at once. May I ask what crime it was that he committed?"

"Technically I believe they called it 'assault with intent to kill.' "

"Ah!"

"It was the priest who was chiefly instrumental in having him excommunicated, whom he assaulted. It happened in the Broad Street Station, when the priest was passing through, after a visit there."

"I understand."

"You see, he was still plying his trade of making rosaries and somehow he found a way to dispose of much of his wares. But his work was so excellent, and in some ways so different, that it was readily recognized. The whole thing culminated as I have described. I think that is all the information you require on the subject, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. It is."

The detective went at once to the telephone, and, having secured the long distance connection he sought, readily obtained the information he desired.

"Michael Cashel is still an inmate of the Moyamensing prison, father," he said when he returned to them. "If his conduct remains as perfect as it has been since he was sent there he will be released at the expiration of eighteen months more, which is the reduction he will obtain by good behavior."

"Did you inquire if he has been permitted to do any such work as this since he has been a prisoner there?" asked the father.

"No, sir. I preferred to ask such questions in person. I shall go to Philadelphia this evening. I will talk with the warden and other officers of the institution, and also with the man himself. Possibly I will have some information on the subject to give you when I return here sometime to-morrow afternoon."

"And will you call upon me and let me know the result of your journey, Mr. Carter?"

"Certainly."

"I shall be anxious to hear, for I confess to an unusual interest in this affair. It is a very puzzling one, and is most amazing, I think. For example——"

"Yes, sir?" said the detective inquiringly, when he hesitated.

"I was about to suggest that the message itself supposes not *one* crime, but *two,* or perhaps more than that."

"I appreciate that fact, sir."

"For example, 'Philip disposed of safely,' has an ominous sound to me. The admonition to 'Bring jewels and cash,' is highly suggestive, and 'Trust me or death for both,' teems with possibilities. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Carter?"

"Perfectly."

"The use of two names may ultimately supply some sort of a clue for you to work upon."

"I have thought of that. Yes, you are right."

"The name of 'Zara' particularly. It is an unusual name."

"Very."

"It is feminine, don't you think, Mr. Carter?"

"It certainly suggests a woman."

"Pardon me for making suggestions, but——"

"I am very glad indeed to have you do so, sir."

"Then I would suggest this: Secure a room somewhere in the city which will accommodate a long table or several small ones. Then engage the services of half a dozen young women and procure as many directories of the city of Washington. Put the young women to work on different sections of the directory with instructions to search for that name of Zara, whether it be a given name or a family name. What do you think of that idea?"

"I think it excellent. It shall be carried out, and at once. Conner, will you attend to that part of the matter?"

"Yes. I will start them in on it the first thing in the morning."

"Another thing, Mr. Carter," said the priest.

"Yes, sir."

"If the name of Zara should be discovered as a given name, let the full name and address be written down and then a search made to discover if there is a Philip who owns to the same surname; and if Zara proves to be a surname, find out if there is a Philip Zara."

"Your suggestions are most excellent, sir," said the detective.

"There is another thing, too, Mr. Carter."

"Well?"

"It is possible that 'Zara' is only the first part of a full name."

"That is true, and I will confess that I had not thought of that possibility."

"For example, I have somewhere heard the name 'Zaraby;' and there is a Spanish name 'Alcazara.' I have no doubt that there are many others that are equally applicable to the four letters Z-a-r-a. At least, I think it is worth investigation."

The detective rose and extended his hand.

"Father," he said, "your suggestions have been very valuable to us. I thank you very much indeed for your interest in the matter, and for the assistance you have already given me."

CHAPTER IV.

FINDING THE TRAIL OF FACTS.

So it followed that Nick Carter took the midnight train out of the city of Washington after all; but he took it only to Philadelphia, instead of to his home in New York, and at nine o'clock the following morning he presented himself at the Moyamensing prison where the warden was awaiting him.

"Before you send for the prisoner I wish to see," said the detective, as soon as the greetings were over, "I would like to ask you a few questions about him."

"All right, Mr. Carter."

"Do you know what his occupation was before he committed the crime that sent him here?"

"Yes. He was employed in Chicago by a catholic institution. Part of his work was the manufacture of rosaries, I believe."

"Precisely. Has he ever been permitted to do any such work since he has been here?"

"No, and yes."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"Well, Cashel—if I referred to him by number it would mean nothing to you—has earned the position as a sort of 'trusty' since he has been here. His conduct has been so uniformly good that we have allowed him many privileges. He has been permitted to work at his own trade from time to time, although of course he has never been allowed to manufacture a rosary. We could not permit that, of course."

"But he has been permitted to make strings of beads, you say?"

"Yes. Many of them, in fact."

"Have you noticed particularly the work that he has done here in that line?"

"Some of it."

"Not all of it, then? I mean, haven't you insisted upon the work he has done of that character passing under your inspection?"

"No; not all of it."

"Do you know what has become of the articles he has made? The bead-work, I mean?"

"Yes. Everything that he has made of that character has been sent away for him, as presents to some of his friends outside. You see, Mr. Carter, as a trusty, he has considerable spare time on his hands. The duties we have given him in the prison he has always performed expeditiously and well and I have permitted him to employ his spare time at his favorite work, so long as he confined it to ordinary strings of beads, and did not attempt the manufacture of rosaries."

"I see. Where does he do this work?"

"In a little closetlike room that I have permitted him to use."

"Not in his cell?"

"No."

"Could you give me any idea as to how many strings of beads he has disposed of, in presents or otherwise, since he has been here?"

"Not without referring to his record."

"I will ask you to do that later for me, if you will; and also to give me the names and addresses of the persons to whom they have been sent. For the present can you approximate it?"

"Not very nearly, I'm afraid. Perhaps a dozen; possibly more than that. Will you tell me why you are so deeply interested in the matter?"

"I will presently; yes. But first let me continue with my inquiries."

"Very well, sir."

"Could you tell me if he has sent away one of his strings of beads very lately?"

"I think there was one forwarded somewhere about two or three weeks ago. I am not certain as to the time."

"Did you happen to see that particular string?"

"No, I don't think I did. My assistant did, however."

"There is, of course, a record somewhere which will tell us to whom it was sent?"

"Certainly."

"Do you happen to know if he has been engaged in the manufacture of such an article since the last one was sent away?"

"I think there is no doubt of it. He passes all his leisure time at it. They are not quickly made, you know."

"I suppose not. Where is the man now?"

"I suppose he is in his little shop, as we call it."

"Would you mind sending him upon some duty that will keep him out of it for a quarter of an hour, say, and permitting me to see the inside of his shop while he is absent, and before he is told that any one is here to see him?"

"I will do so, certainly. But, really, you have excited my curiosity. I hope——"

"My dear sir, I will explain every point to you as soon as I understand it a little bit more perfectly myself. That is what I came here to do."

"I know that you would not come here and ask me all these questions without a definite object, not unless you had a very good reason. That explains why I am somewhat anxious to be told what it is all about."

"As soon as I am a little more certain myself, warden."

"If you will wait here a moment, Mr. Carter, I will send him out and then take you to his little shop."

"Thank you."

Five minutes later the detective was conducted to the small room, not larger than an ordinary closet, although it was supplied with a good window which looked out upon the inner court of the prison—the small room where Michael Cashel worked at his favorite employment.

A plank extended from one end of the room to the other, underneath the window, and upon it in neat arrangement was an assortment of tools such as were necessary in the work he did.

"Every tool that the man uses is checked off and deposited in its proper place each day when he is through with them," explained the warden, noticing the detective's expression of surprise that a prisoner should be permitted the use of so many sharp-edged tools. "We have found him entirely trustworthy."

"Precisely," said the detective laconically, stepping closer to the bench. "I shall not disturb anything. For the present I prefer that he shall not know that any one has visited this room in his absence. Ah! This is the string of beads upon which he is at work just now, I see."

The detective pointed with his finger toward a line of beads that were linked together on the bench. It was evidently nowhere near completion and it was resting where the man had dropped it when he was called away from the work at Nick's request.

The completed section was possibly eighteen inches in length; the beads of which it was composed were much larger than those in the string that the detective had in his pocket. In fact, the smallest ones were as large as the largest in Nick's possession; the others were proportionately larger, as were the links that connected them.

"Cashel is making that particular string for my daughter," the warden explained, when the detective bent over it in careful scrutiny.

"Indeed?" replied Nick, scarcely hearing what he said.

"Yes. Mazie has seen some of his work from time to time, and she expressed a wish to have him make a necklace for her. I told him about it, and he is making it."

"Good." Nick was reading the telegraphic words he saw before him, as expressed in the unfinished work. So far as it had progressed, it read: "May trouble forever pass you by on the other side and——." That was all. Evidently the man could not resist the temptation to make words, even in this necklace that he was manufacturing for the warden's daughter.

"We will return to your office now," said the detective. "I have seen all that I care to see here."

And indeed he had.

The little that he had observed had told him that Cashel was not working in the dark; that he himself understood telegraphy, and that the designs had not been supplied to him, as at one time appeared might be the case.

When they were again seated in the office of the prison, Nick remarked:

"I wonder, warden, if you would do me still another small favor?"

"I think so. What is it?" was the reply.

"Before I enter into an explanation of my rather strange conduct and methods since I have been here, will you permit me to talk with this prisoner alone?"

"Why, yes; only——"

"Understand me, warden, I do not make the request because of any desire to keep you in ignorance of what passes between us. I make it only because I believe I can induce him to give me the information I seek, if I am alone with him, whereas if you were present I am convinced that I could get nothing out of him. Believe me, I speak as much in your interests as in my own."

"I understand you. It shall be as you request."

"Thank you."

"Shall I send for him now?"

"Yes. In a moment. I do not wish him to be told who I am."

"Certainly not."

"Nor to suspect that I am a detective—until I tell him so myself."

"Of course not."

"How old a man is he, warden?"

"He is quite young; not yet thirty."

"Indeed! And what sort of a looking chap?"

"You know what a handsome man an Irishman is when he is handsome, don't you? Well, I believe he is the best-looking one I ever saw. He is really a very striking-looking man, and he is built like a combination of Hercules and Apollo. You don't realize his size until you stand next to him, and then you are impressed by it."

"I see. What sort of a record did he have before he came here? Do you know anything about that?"

"Only that as far as I have been able to learn, it was good. I don't think he was ever in prison before. He is not a criminal as we understand the term. It was an unfortunate affair that brought him here. He attacked a priest who had had him excommunicated. I have never been told why that was done."

"Has he had visitors?"

"Twice only."

"When?"

"A young woman came to see him shortly after he was imprisoned here. She never came a second time, but about three months ago a man came to see him."

"Do you know who they were, or anything about them?"

"I know the names they gave to us. I suppose they are the right names. I see no reason why they should not be so."

"What were the names?"

"The young woman called herself Miss Mulligan. The man signed himself as P. D. Moran."

"Did you hear their given names?"

"I did not hear the man's name; but I happened to be present when he bade the young woman good-by, and the name he used was so peculiar that I have not forgotten it."

"Indeed? What was it?"

"He called her Zara."

The detective smiled, well pleased by this information. Here was tangible evidence of the existence of Zara and of her association with the man who made the string of beads; and the first initial of the man's name might stand for Philip.

CHAPTER V.

A REMARKABLE PRISONER.

When Michael Cashel entered the room where the detective was awaiting him, Nick saw at once that the warden had not overestimated the personal appearance of the man.

He was handsome, and, notwithstanding the prison garb he wore, there was a certain air of dignity about him which was at once evident.

It was evident also that he was a man of breeding and of education. He greeted the detective calmly and in a softly respectful tone, then stood in front of him, waiting to be told what was wanted.

"You may be seated," said Nick, pointing to a chair which the man accepted with an almost inaudible "thank you." And Nick added, after a short pause:

"I have sent for you to ask you a few questions which I hope you will answer for me."

"Yes, sir. If I can answer them."

"I think you can if you will. The first one is this: *Who is Zara?*"

The detective purposely sprang the question on the man without the least warning, for he had no idea that it would be answered, at least, truthfully, and he wished to notice the effect of it upon the prisoner.

In this, however, he was disappointed, for there was no appreciable effect whatever. Cashel replied quite calmly, and without so much as the flicker of an eyelid:

"I have a sister by that name, but it cannot be possible that you refer to her."

"I hope not for your sake," replied the detective as calmly, "for the Zara to whom I refer seems to be involved in some trouble."

"If you would give me the last name, sir—if it is Cashel, the same as mine, why——"

"The Zara to whom I refer was called Mulligan when she was here to see you."

"Ah; but Miss Mulligan is not named Zara, sir;" this was also said without the betrayal of any particular interest.

"You called her by that name when she was parting with you, after her visit here."

"Did I? I was not aware of it. It was done inadvertently, then. We had been talking of my sister and it is possible that I mentioned the name. But you tell me that Miss Mulligan is in trouble of some kind. Will you also tell me what it is?"

"I said that Zara is in trouble. I had supposed that Zara and Miss Mulligan were one and the same."

"No; that is a mistake."

"Where is your sister Zara at the present time?"

"I do not know. I have no idea."

"Where is her home?"

"I do not even know that."

"Isn't it somewhat strange that you do not know where your own sister lives?" the detective asked.

"No; not when you consider that I have neither seen her nor heard from her since a considerable time before I came here. My sister—indeed, my whole family—repudiated me utterly when I was excommunicated by the church. I have no doubt that you are informed as to that, also?"

Nick did not reply to the question. Instead he asked another one.

"Perhaps you will tell me who Philip is?"

"Philip? I know many Philips, sir," was the cool reply.

Nick saw very plainly that he could not hope to take the man off his guard. He was prepared at every point and it was quite evident that he would give no information concerning the subjects that interested the detective unless he was somehow compelled to do so.

"Have you friends in the city of Washington?" was the next question the detective asked.

"I have no friends at all, anywhere in the world, unless I have made a few here in this prison," was the calm reply.

"Where did you learn telegraphy?" was the next question that the detective shot at him.

This time Nick scored a bull's eye, for the prisoner did start ever so little, and a flush of red mounted slowly to his temples; but he replied calmly enough:

"Telegraphy? I learned it when I was a boy. May I ask why you ask me that question?"

"I ask it because I have seen some of the beadwork that you have sent out from this prison since you have been an inmate here."

This statement had quite an opposite effect upon the man than Nick had expected.

He did no seem to be startled by it, or to be in the least frightened. On the contrary, the only emotion that his expression betrayed was anger. More blood throbbed in his temples, two straight lines appeared vertically between his brows, his lips tightened for an instant and his gray eyes narrowed perceptibly.

Then, with just a suggestion of a shrug of his broad shoulders, he replied:

"Yes? Have you, indeed?"

The prisoner was evidently a man of considerable character, and he had extraordinary self-possession. He was one who could not be browbeaten at all; that much Nick realized.

For a moment he was in doubt how best to proceed, now that he had gone as far as he had; but after a moment of thought he thrust his hand into his pocket and brought forth the telegraphic bead message that he had found in Washington so strangely.

"Here is one of the specimens of your handiwork that has come into my possession," he said. "It is rather interesting, too. I wonder if you will condescend to explain the significance of it to me."

The blood had now receded from the prisoner's temples, leaving his face strangely pale, even for one who had already assumed the "prison pallor." He fixed his eyes intently upon the string of beads in the detective's hand, but Nick purposely held it so that it was impossible for the man to read a word of the message that was there. He had an idea that Cashel might not recognize it at once.

"If you will permit me to examine it more closely, sir," the prisoner suggested.

Nick gave it into his hand without objection and watched him narrowly as he slowly ran it through his fingers, reading it as he did so.

But again there was no emotion visible on the face of the prisoner. If he felt any at all he was certainly expert in concealing the fact.

As Nick had done when he first found the beads, the prisoner traversed the length of the string twice, reading as he did so; then, with just the faintest tightening of his lips, he returned it to the detective, but without uttering a word.

"Well?" said Nick.

"Well, sir?" was the reply.

"Is this your handiwork?"

"It was, originally; yes, sir."

"What do you mean by that answer?"

"I mean that I made the article you now hold in your hand; but that I did not make it in the form in which it now stands.. The work is mine, but I have never sent out any such message as the one you can read there."

"Do you mean to tell me that the message has been changed since this string of beads was in your possession?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was the original message that was here, then?"

"I need not tell you that, need I?"

"Since torture is not permitted in prison now, I suppose there is no way of compelling you to do so against your will," replied the detective. "But if you are telling me the truth when you say that you did not originate this message, I think it would be much better for you to tell me everything you know about it."

"Possibly, sir—I do not mean to be impertinent, believe me—possibly, sir, I am the best judge as to that."

"Do you refuse to tell me what the original message of these beads was?"

"Yes, sir; if you will pardon me for doing so."

"To whom was this particular string of beads sent?"

"I need not reply to that question either."

"You mean that you *will* not?"

"Yes, sir."

"There are ways of finding out. There has been a record kept of each string that you have been permitted to send away from here."

The man made no reply to this. He had not even appeared to be interested.

"You read the message, did you not?" asked Nick.

"Yes, sir."

"And you insist that there has been a change since you made the string?"

"Yes."

"Do you understand the significance of the present message?"

"I know what it says because I read it."

"Are you determined to give me no information concerning it?"

"I have no information to give you, sir."

"The warden has not been told as yet about your activities, Cashel. He does not know that I have these beads in my possession."

"But he will be told; he will know."

"Yes."

"I am sorry. It will deprive me of a great deal of pleasure that I have found since I have been here."

"It will also deprive you of your opportunities for secret correspondence with the outside world, will it not?"

"Yes. Certainly."

"Would you like me to tell you where I discovered this message of yours?"

"It makes no difference to me, sir. It is not my message, as I have already told you."

"Listen to me, Cashel. I was told last night over the telephone that your good behavior since you have been here had secured you a reduction of eighteen months of your sentence."

"Yes, sir."

"Aren't you aware that this discovery will put you back again to your full time?"

"I suppose it will, sir. I had not thought of it."

"Well, don't you think that under the circumstances if things could be arranged so that you would not be deprived of the reduction, it would be advisable for you to help me all you can in this matter?"

"I do not see it in just that light, sir."

"You are incorrigible!"

"No; I am only a helpless prisoner who happens to be the possessor of secrets that I cannot betray. That is all."

"You look as if you were telling me the truth. I wish that I might believe you, but I cannot. Tell me this: Is the Zara who is referred to here in this message your sister?"

"I am afraid, sir, that the message does refer to my sister. Still—I will tell you this much—there is another person by that name to whom it might refer."

"And who is the Philip who was 'disposed of'?"

"I may not reply to that question, sir."

"Cashel, answer this: Suppose the prison authorities were not informed of your secret, tell me what would be your future conduct in that case?"

"I would see no reason to change it from what it has been in the past, sir. May I ask you one question, please. Will you tell me who you are?"

"I am Nick Carter. Possibly you have heard of me," replied Nick dryly; but he was not at all prepared for the effect the announcement had upon the prisoner.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONVICT'S SECRET.

The prisoner caught his breath sharply when Nick told him who he was. He half-started from the chair in which he was seated, but only to fall back again. Twice he parted his lips as if to speak, but each time seemed to think better of it, and so withheld whatever it was he wished to say.

"You seem to have something on your mind that you would like to get off it," said the detective dryly.

"I wanted to ask you a question, sir, but I remember that I am a convict, and have no right or privilege to do so."

"I will grant you the privilege, then. You may ask me as many questions as you like. It does not follow, of course, that I will answer them; but I will at least hear them."

"Thank you, sir."

"Well, what is it that you would like to ask?"

"I would like to know why you are interested in this matter at all, if you will tell me; and also in whose interest you are working; and——"

"One question at a time, if you please."

"Yes, sir; pardon me."

"I see no objection to replying to you quite frankly. Possibly if I do so it may induce you to be as frank with me."

"There is always a possibility of that, sir," replied the prisoner, with a quiet smile; the first that had appeared on his face since he entered the room.

"Very well. You asked me why I am interested in this matter of the telegraphic beads. I reply with perfect truth that I am interested only because I found the beads quite by accident, and also entirely by accident discovered that they contained a message, which, as I understand telegraphy, I was enabled to read. You will see, therefore, that I am not working in the interest of any person whatever, unless possibly you might place the victim of this conspiracy in that category."

"Thank you, sir. I believe you. I——"

"Oh, do you? That is considerate of you, really."

"Please pardon me. I did not mean my remark as it sounded."

"Very well. Go ahead."

"You told me that I could ask as many questions as I liked."

"Yes."

"Why should you have interested yourself in the matter to the extent of tracing me out, as you have done?"

"Call it a whim. I am a detective. The mystery of the affair attracted me. The message suggests at least two crimes. It suggests one murder, certainly, possibly two. Zara and Philip are two persons who are mentioned in the message. Philip is already disposed of; Zara is inside the carriage, possibly *to be* disposed of later. There are immense possibilities in that message. I experienced a desire to know more about the affair. I had a latent hope that possibly you would assist me."

"Will you tell me how you connected me with the beads?"

"Very simply. I took them to a catholic priest who recognized your work."

"You have suggested that the beads were found in Washington; perhaps it was to Father O'Shaughensy you took the beads."

"It was."

The prisoner nodded.

"Will you tell me when you found them?" he asked presently.

"Yesterday afternoon, shortly after three o'clock."

"A little while ago you offered to tell me where and I evinced no interest as to that. If you will tell me now I would like to know."

"I found them lying against the curb, in the gutter, at the northwest corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Four-and-a-half Street. Do you know where that is?"

"Yes."

"That is where I discovered them."

"I suppose you decided that they had been dropped there the preceding night, sir?"

"Yes; although they might have been there a longer time. It might have been one or two nights preceding that one."

"I think those are all the questions I care to ask at present, Mr. Carter. I am very grateful to you for your kindness, sir."

"Have you nothing to tell me in return for my kindness, then?" asked the detective, with some disgust in his tone.

"No, sir; not at present. I must have some time to think upon it."

"Do you mean that you may decide to talk later on?"

"Yes, sir, if you are really Nick Carter."

"Oh! You are in some doubt as to that? Is that what you mean?"

"I don't think I am in doubt about it, sir; but I would have to be absolutely certain."

"The warden knows me; you might ask him," suggested Nick, with irony. "Upon my word you are a strange creature."

"Possibly, sir. Please understand that I do not wish to offend you. Far from it; I would like if possible to win your good opinion."

"You are adopting rather an original method of doing so."

"Perhaps. I will say this, Mr. Carter: Twice in my life I have been on the point of going to New York to see you and consult with you. Those times were, of course, before I got into my present trouble. On two other occasions I have seriously contemplated sending for you in the hope that you would help me."

"And when were those occasions?"

"One was immediately after my banishment from the church; the other was immediately after my incarceration here."

"You are somewhat of an enigma, Cashel."

"Yes, sir. I realize it fully."

"Perhaps it is your choice."

"No, sir; it is my misfortune."

"Are you determined not to take me any deeper into your confidence to-day?"

"I am afraid that for the present things must remain as they are, sir."

"And if you should decide differently, after you have had opportunity to think it over?"

"If you will leave your address with the warden I will ask him to send for you."

"Do you now think that there is likelihood that you will decide to confide in me?"

"I do, sir; but I must have time to think."

"How much time, do you suppose?"

"I cannot say as to that."

"Then our interview for the present is ended, I think."

"If you are through with me; yes, sir."

Nick struck the bell that was on the desk at his hand, and after a moment the warden entered. Cashel had risen before the warden appeared and stood ready to leave the room.

"Are you through with the prisoner, Mr. Carter?" the warden asked.

"Yes."

As soon as Nick and the warden were alone together, the detective said:

"Now, if you are ready to listen, I will tell you the whole story of this affair, as far as I know it; only, the things that I do not know about it would fill a very large volume."

"My curiosity has reached the straining-point; I will admit that," replied the official, with a smile.

"Well, I brought this with me," began the detective, producing the string of beads and putting them into the warden's hand.

Then he began at the beginning and told how he had found them, how he had discovered the fact that they contained a message, and how he had finally traced them to the prisoner who had just left the room. He also related what he had read on the necklace that Cashel was making for the warden's daughter, and he concluded by saying:

"And there is no doubt that every string of beads that he has sent out from here as gifts to outsiders, contained messages of some sort."

That the official was shocked and angered goes without saying. He was chagrined, too, to think that he had been so easily deceived, and he expressed himself in no measured phrase about it. It would perhaps have been exceedingly unpleasant for Cashel if Nick Carter had not thought it wise to interfere.

"Warden," he said, "without in any way committing myself, I have permitted Cashel to suppose that I might not take you into my confidence in this matter. I think, if your are willing, I would like you to say nothing whatever to him about it. By absolute silence on the subject, and by permitting him to go on just as he has been doing until I came here, he may conclude that I have not told you; and in that case, he may even attempt to send out other messages in the same manner."

"I am afraid he is too smart for that, Carter."

"So am I; but it will do no harm to give him the opportunity."

"Suppose he should wish to send another present of beads outside? Eh?"

"Why, that is precisely what I want him to do. Send the package to me, properly addressed as he desires it, and I will, after reading it, undertake to deliver it in person."

"I see. Good."

"Now that you know the secret, you can, of course, read it yourself before you send it to me."

"I'm inclined to think that I will have to engage the services of a telegraph operator to do that, Carter. However, as you suggest, it will do no harm to make the effort to get him to send more messages. Don't you think, though, that you are chasing a wild goose?"

"Perhaps; but the case interests me hugely. I wish to see it through."

"Shall I tell you how it strikes me?"

"Yes."

"It looks to me like a plot to escape from this prison. It might be a concerted plan, in which many of the convicts are concerned, for all we know."

"No; I do not think that at all. Cashel does not impress me as being that kind. I think he has decided to serve out his full time, but that he is attempting something else outside, while he is here, thus establishing the best of alibis. You consent to my plan, then?"

"Yes. Gladly. Like you, I would like to know about the mystery of this affair."

"There is another thing, warden."

"What is that?"

"Once or twice I think he was on the point of taking me into his confidence, but he finally decided not to do so until he had had time to think it over carefully. But he promised me that when he arrived at a decision, he would send for me through you."

"Well?"

"If he should inform you that he would like to see me, will you wire the one word rosary, to me at my house? There need be no signature. I will understand; and the information will be forwarded to me if I am not there."

"Yes. I will do that."

"Then I think I will get back to Washington without delay. I think the solution of the mystery lies there, or near there."

"All right."

"And you will do nothing to change your attitude toward Cashel in the meantime?"

"Not a thing, Carter. Not a thing."

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERY OF AN ABANDONED HACK.

The detective arrived back in the city of Washington at six o'clock that evening for he was fortunate in just catching one of the fast trains at West Philadelphia. Conner, to whom he had sent a wire, met him at the station.

"Well, what luck?"

They both asked the same question in exactly the same words at the same instant, and the ludicrousness of it made them both laugh outright.

"Let's get something to eat," said the detective then. "We can both tell our stories at the table, and I'm half-famished;" and so they sought a quiet corner at the Raleigh, where, as they waited for their dinner to be brought, Nick related all that had occurred to him during his trip to the Quaker City.

"I thought I'd tell my story first," he said in conclusion, "because it might possibly have some bearing on whatever you may have discovered through searching the directory. I do not quite swallow that story of Cashel's about Zara being his sister. In fact, the man puzzles me mightily. I don't mind admitting that I can't make him out at all. Now what have you got up your sleeve?"

"Very little, I'm afraid. As a matter of fact, we found three Zaras in the directory."

"Three, eh?"

"Yes. Two of them are given names. The other is a surname, pure and simple."

"Spelled in just that way?"

"Yes."

"More than one of them in the family?"

"Apparently not. Zenobia Zara is the full name."

"Probably a female; no?"

"It would seem so, I think."

"Any particulars? Suppose you give them all to me, one after another."

Conner took a slip of paper from his pocket and read aloud from it to Nick:

"Zara Mulligan, number——"

"Eh? What's that?" interrupted the detective. "Have you forgotten that I just told you that the woman who called upon Cashel at the prison gave her name as Mulligan and that the prisoner inadvertently addressed her as Zara as she was leaving him?"

"No. I have not forgotten it."

"All right. Go on."

"'Zara Mulligan, No. ——— C Street, Southeast,'" Conner read aloud from the slip of paper in his hand.

"Doesn't it say whether she is a spinster, a widow, or what?"

"No; just the name and address. That's all."

"You haven't looked her up as yet, I suppose?"

"I haven't looked any of them up. I only received the results of the search half an hour ago."

"What's the next one?"

"This: 'Zara Zalinsky, Musician.' The address is in Q Street, near Seventeenth, northwest."

"That sounds as if it might be a man."

"I think it might represent either a man or a woman."

"And the next one is the Zenobia Zara, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, what of her?"

"The entry reads: 'Zenobia Zara, Instructor.' She has two addresses. She lives in the southeast section of the city and has an office in F Street, near Thirteenth, northwest."

"The business is given merely as instructor, eh? It doesn't say what she teaches?"

"No."

"I think, Con, that we had better get busy right away; I mean, as soon as we have finished our dinners. It is barely possible that Cashel might find a way to send some sort of a message out of the prison, you know, and put his friends wise to what has happened there to-day. Of course it isn't likely; but——"

"I agree with you. The question is shall we make the calls together, or shall we separate and you take one while I take the other?"

"We'll separate, I think," replied the detective. "You go out to Q Street, northwest, and find out what you can about Zara Zalinsky, the musician. I will go to C Street, southeast, and call upon Miss Zara Mulligan, and after we have made those calls we will meet at the corner of New Jersey Avenue and B Street, southeast, and will go together to find out who Zenobia Zara happens to be."

"All right. That is a good arrangement."

"Whoever arrives at the place of meeting first will wait there for the other one; eh?"

"Yes."

"Have you looked over the newspapers to-day, Con?" asked Nick presently.

"No. I glanced at the *Post* this morning, but I haven't seen the *Star* or the *Times*. The fact is I have been too busy. I have assisted, myself, in that search of the directory."

The detective did not reply, but he beckoned to a waiter and sent him to get a *Star*. It was brought presently and laid upon the table at his hand, but he did not at once look at it. However, after a moment he raised it in his hand, and then Conner saw him give a slight start and bend his attention closely upon something he had discovered there.

"I say, Con," he said presently, "it is too bad that you did not look at this paper a bit earlier. There is something here that may be interesting."

"What is it?"

For reply the detective began to read aloud, but in a low tone, an article from the paper he held in his hand. We need not give it here in detail, but the substance of it was as follows:

A hack with one wheel off had been found that morning far out on the Cabin John road, not far from the bridge. It had been drawn a considerable distance out of the road and it had the appearance of having been left there by the driver until he could come after it and take it away.

But there were those who remembered to have seen it there the preceding day, and finally a gentleman who had passed it several times and whose curiosity was aroused, had stopped to examine it more closely.

What attracted him most was the fact that the curtains were drawn and that the axle from which the wheel was missing had been propped up so that the body of the vehicle was held in its normal position.

When the gentleman attempted to open the door of the deserted hack he found that it had been fastened in some manner, and naturally leaped at the conclusion that the owner had somehow locked the door so that the cushions and possibly other articles inside the carriage would not be stolen while it was left standing there.

While he hesitated whether to open it or not, for he disliked to break into the vehicle, Major Moore, who was at that time chief of police, drove along the road toward Cabin John, and the gentleman, recognizing him, hailed him.

The major, when he heard the story that the man told, to the effect that the carriage had been standing there deserted since early the preceding morning, he lost no time in breaking open the door with the result that an exceedingly gruesome discovery was made.

The dead body of a young man was inside the deserted hack. He had been stabbed, and the weapon was still in the wound, which must have been instantly fatal.

Inside the hack, promiscuously piled there was a double harness, or, rather, the harnesses for a pair of horses, evidently those which had drawn the hack to that place.

They had the appearance of having been thrown inside hurriedly although they did partly conceal the body of the dead man.

There was no evidence whatever as to what had become of the horses. The missing wheel was found among some bushes a short distance away, with nothing whatever the matter of it.

It had been removed from the axle deliberately in order to give the impression that an accident had happened. That was all.

A strange feature of the case was that although diligent search had been made for the owner of the hack, such a person could not be found.

Every liveryman in the city had been questioned, as well as all the licensed hackmen, but without result. Nobody had been discovered who had lost a hack.

Such was the story that Nick read to his companion. There were other details which need not be enlarged upon here.

"Con," said the detective when he had finished the reading, "that young man in the hack was 'Philip.' Eh?"

"I don't think there is any doubt of that."

"Have you finished your dinner?"

"Yes."

"Well, we will carry out our program just as we outlined it. After that we will call upon the major; we will get the inside particulars about the hack, and we will take a look at the body. But I think that we should lose no time in getting a line on the three Zaras."

"I agree with you there, Nick."

They separated at the door of the hotel where Nick took a southbound green car and Conner sprang upon one going in the opposite direction.

But the search was not to be so easy as it had appeared.

At the door of the house mentioned in the directory as the home of Zara Mulligan, Nick was informed that such a person used to live there, but had moved away several months before and her present address was not known, so Nick hurried back to Pennsylvania Avenue, found a telephone, called up the superintendent of mails at the post-office, told who he was and asked if any forwarding address had been filed there for Zara Mulligan.

None had. Plainly the search for that elusive person was up in the air for the time being.

Nick hastened then to the place of meeting with Conner, arriving but a few moments in advance of his friend to whom he related the result of his efforts.

"Now what about Zara Zalinsky?" he asked in conclusion.

"Zara Zalinsky is a Pole; a long-haired musician; plays in the orchestra at the vaudeville theater; was just leaving the house to go there when I arrived, so we came down in the car together. He has no more to do with this case than the man in the moon."

"Come, then. We will call upon Zenobia Zara at the home address. I don't think it will result in anything, but neither do I think we should neglect it."

"Nor I. We will walk, eh? It isn't far from here, you know."

The house was one of the very old two-story brick houses that throng in the southeast section of Washington. It stood well back from the street and was approached through a gate in a rickety and rust-eaten iron fence.

Weeds had been permitted to accumulate in the dooryard; grass grew up between the edges of the narrow flagged walk that led to the narrow porch. The house itself was dark.

"This looks sufficiently mysterious," said the detective.

"I should say so," was the reply.

Peal after peal upon the door-bell, which they could plainly hear, brought no response, and presently the detective pulled his picklock from his pocket, and with the remark, "I am going inside," applied the magician-like instrument.

The door opened easily, and the two men passed noiselessly inside the house.

Neither realized it, but they were on the eve of a discovery which was to puzzle them infinitely more than anything that had happened as yet in this strange and unusual case.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CHAPTER OF STARTLING INCIDENTS.

As soon as they were inside the front hall Conner struck a match and lighted the gas over his head.

The two men discovered that they were in an ordinary front hall, plainly furnished with an old-fashioned hatrack, one chair beside it, and a worn and faded carpet. To their right was the parlor door, which Nick at once pushed open.

Haircloth furniture was here, an antiquated piano, a whatnot in one corner, and so forth. The room seemed to be in perfect order and the atmosphere inside suggested that it had not long been deserted of human occupancy.

Had the hour been less early in the evening one might have supposed that the people who lived in the house had merely retired; but it still lacked a few minutes of nine o'clock, so such an explanation of the deserted house was not likely.

The back parlor presented almost the same appearance as the front room, and after glancing inside, the detective turned and led the way toward the stairs.

Naturally they passed into the front room first and as before, Conner struck a match and ignited the gas; and then at the same instant they discovered an object stretched upon the bed which instantly explained the deathlike silence in the house.

The body of a woman was there.

She was lying upon the bed, which had not been opened, and was fully dressed. Beside her, lying so that her dead fingers almost touched it, was a corkless vial to which the odor of bitter almonds still relentlessly clung.

"Prussic acid," said Nick laconically. "Don't you smell it, Con?"

"Yes. Plain case of suicide, isn't it?"

"It certainly looks like it. I suppose this must be Zenobia Zara; eh?"

"That would be the natural supposition, I think, Nick."

"It may be only a coincidence, Con, but it begins to look to me as though this might have some connection with our case; don't you think so?"

"That is difficult to determine, I think. More likely it is a mere coincidence."

Nick stepped forward and rested his hand for an instand upon the woman's forehead. When he withdrew it he remarked:

"She has been dead some time. Many hours, I should say;" and Conner nodded.

The woman had been of rather striking appearance in life evidently. She was not beautiful, and yet when that dead face had been animated it was doubtless very attractive.

"Somewhere about thirty years old, shouldn't you say, Con?" asked the detective.

"Yes."

"There is something about that face which makes me think that I have seen it before," continued the detective. "I can't place it just now, and I won't try for the present. It has all the appearances of a plain case of suicide."

"Yes. I think so, too."

"Well, let's get out."

"We'll telephone, eh, to——"

"No. We are going straight to police headquarters anyway. We will tell the major about it when we get there, and let him handle the matter as he sees fit. I don't think this is any part of our case; at least, it doesn't strike me so now."

So they turned off the lights and passed out of the house without having disturbed anything at all, leaving the interior exactly as they had found it; and twenty minutes later they were in the private office of the major, where, before they entered upon the real purpose of their call, they told about their latest discovery.

The major, who was fortunately at his office, gave directions at once concerning the supposed suicide; and then the detective, beginning with the finding of the string of beads that contained the telegraphic message, related to the chief everything that had occurred since it was found.

In conclusion he said:

"There seems to be no doubt, major, that the body of the man found in the deserted hack out on the Cabin John road, is the Philip referred to in this rosarylike message."

"I reckon that's so, all right, Nick," was the reply. "It's a queer combination, though, isn't it?"

"It certainly is."

"Do you connect your discovery of to-night with that message, or with the body in the hack, Nick?"

"No; I hardly think so. And yet there is a possibility. It was only the name Zara that took us to the house at all. I would suggest, if I may, that you put the machinery of your department to work on it and find out all you can about Zenobia Zara."

"Of course. I shall do that at once."

"The directory says that she maintained an office of some kind in F Street, and that she was an instructor. If that is the case, she must have had many pupils, and doubtless among them there will be one or more who can give all the needed information about her."

"Oh, yes, I don't think there will be any difficulty about that part of it."

"And now, what do you know about the body taken from the hack, that did not appear in the published report, major?"

"Not a thing."

"The body has not been identified, then?"

"No; and there was not a scrap of anything upon it to aid in identification; not even a laundry-mark, or a watch, or a scrap of paper."

"How old a man was he, major?"

"Between thirty and thirty-five, I should say. We will go and take a look at it if you like. I think he is the Philip of your message, all right."

"Have you succeeded in tracing the hack?" asked Nick, as they strolled along together on their errand.

"We have got on the trace of it. There is a liveryman in Baltimore who has lost a hack and a pair of horses. He is coming over in the morning to identify his property, if it is his. By the way, the horses were found late this afternoon."

"Indeed? Where?"

"At least, we suppose them to be the horses. They were found way at the other extremity of the city; down near the Bennings race-track, to be explicit. Also, within half a mile of where they were found feeding beside the road, two saddles and bridles were also discovered, so I am inclined to think that after the crime was committed and the harnesses removed from the horses, they were saddled and ridden away from the spot by the driver of the hack and the other person who was inside it with the man who was killed, and who undoubtedly committed the deed."

They walked on in silence after that until they stood beside the body; and the moment his eyes rested upon it Nick Carter uttered a sharp exclamation.

"What's the matter?" asked the major quickly.

"Another surprise; that's all," replied the detective.

"Well, give us the benefit of it, if you please."

"My exclamation was caused by the fact that if I did not know it to be utterly impossible, I could almost take my oath that this dead man is the convict to whom I talked in the prison at Moyamensing this morning. It is his exact counterpart, or very nearly so."

"Hm!" grunted the major. "The plot gets thicker all the time, doesn't it?"

"It seems to; yes."

"What is your idea about it, Nick?"

"I don't think I have got one, yet. Only, since Cashel stated that he had a sister, it is not unlikely that he also had a brother. Perhaps a twin brother, and if so, this is he. This man was not as old as you say, major. Death has aged his appearance somewhat. The man in the prison is in his thirtieth year."

"Have you looked at him all you care to?" asked the major.

"Yes."

"Then let's return to my office. What time is it?"

"Ten minutes after ten."

"Well, I'm going to call up the warden of that prison on the telephone and ask him if he will send Michael Cashel over here under guard, to identify this dead man. That may give us a boost in the mystery. Don't you think so?"

"Yes; but can the warden take his prisoner out of the state? I'm afraid——"

"He can if he wants to. He has the power whether he has the legal right or not. In his place if he asked the favor of me, I'd have the man there as soon as a train could take me. I think he will do the same for me."

"There is a train which leaves Philadelphia for Washington about two in the morning. If he will bring his man over on that train he will arrive here soon after six and he can be back at the prison with him before noon to-morrow. Come along."

"I don't think you will get very much sleep to-night, major," suggested Conner.

"Sleep? I'm not going to bed to-night. You two fellows have roused me up for fair. Say, I think we ought to set the machinery to work finding out what has become of that Miss or Mrs. Zara Mulligan, don't you?"

"Yes."

"I'll have a house to house inquiry made in the neighborhood for people who knew her. We will find out something about this affair before to-morrow night this time, or I'm a Dutchman!"

"I hope so."

It took the major the better part of half an hour to convince the warden of the prison over the telephone of the expediency of his suggestion; but consent was finally obtained, and with the result that when the train arrived soon after six o'clock in the morning Nick Carter, Conner, and the major were there to meet it.

It had been agreed that Cashel was not to be informed why he was taken on the trip to Washington, although since Nick's interview with him, he might surmise something of its import.

If he did so, he made no sign.

When Nick greeted him as he stepped down from the train, handcuffed to one of the guards who accompanied them, he returned the greeting with the same calm and unmoved demeanor that he had maintained throughout his interview with the detective the preceding day. He had been supplied with citizens' clothing for the journey, and save for the shackles on his left wrist, and the pallor of the prison, he looked not at all like a dangerous criminal.

"Cashel," said the detective, stepping forward, "if I will remove that bracelet from your wrist while we walk through the streets will you give me your word that you will make no effort to escape, or to do injury to yourself or to others?"

"Yes, sir; and I will keep my word. Thank you."

There was some slight demur on the part of the guard, but Nick overcame it, and with the result that the seven men left the station together with the major and the warden leading, followed by Nick and Cashel walking side by side while next came Conner and the two guards.

And so they hastened directly to the room where the body of the dead man was laid out; and there, when the door was opened Cashel was thrust forward quickly and suddenly so that he stood beside the corpse before he realized what was happening.

Then he started wildly. He cried out in pain, clenched his hands and then fell upon his knees beside the body, exclaiming:

"Philip! Philip! My brother!" and he buried his face in his hands and sobbed aloud.

CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGE CONFESSION.

They did not disturb him in his grief, for it was very real. There was not one in that room who did not pity the man profoundly, and there was not a word spoken or a move made until he himself rose slowly again to his feet and turned a haggard face toward the detective, who stood nearest to him.

"Pardon me," he said, quite calmly. "It was a great shock. I wish that you might have prepared me for it, Mr. Carter."

"I wish now that I had done so, Cashel," replied the detective. "But you were so reticent when I talked with you yesterday that I was afraid to trust you."

"I understand. I do not blame you; nor would you blame me if you knew all the truth."

"That is precisely what I wish you to tell me—all the truth, Cashel."

"Perhaps, perhaps. I think perhaps I will. I have almost decided to do so. It was the resemblance my brother and I bore to each other that made you send for me?"

"Yes. You identify this body, then, as Philip Cashel, your brother?" asked the detective.

"I identify him as my brother, but not as Philip Cashel."

"Then Cashel is not your right name?"

"No."

"Will you tell me what it is?"

"No. At least, not at present."

"Is it Mulligan?"

"No."

"Was not the Miss Mulligan who called upon you at the prison—Zara Mulligan, as I now know her name to be—was she not your sister?"

"Yes. I will admit that much to you now."

"Then you lied to me about it when I talked with you at the prison, did you?"

"Yes; but not directly. I only deceived you. I have another sister—a half-sister—and when I was talking with you I eased my conscience by telling myself that I was referring to her all the time."

"Hm! We will refer to her again later. For the present I wish to tell you that Zara Mulligan has disappeared. Don't you think it likely that something of this sort"—he indicated the corpse as he spoke—"might have happened to her, also?"

"Disappeared? How do you know that?" Cashel asked quickly, ignoring the question.

"We found her address in the directory, but we could not find her."

"Her address? What was it?"

"In C Street, southeast."

"Oh, she moved away from there long ago, Mr. Carter. It is not strange that you did not find her."

"How do you know that she moved away from there long ago?" asked Nick quickly.

"Because when she went to the prison to see me she told me that she should change her address at once; and it was agreed—or, rather, she stated—that she would keep changing it every little while."

"Oh, I see. She was trying to hide from some one, then?"

"Yes."

"From the law?"

"No."

"From enemies?"

"Yes; put it that way."

"Cashel—I will continue to call you that—have you any idea who murdered your brother? Do you know who struck that blow?"

"No."

"Honestly?"

"I have no more idea whose hand struck him down than you have."

"Then do you know *why* he was killed?"

"Yes. I think so."

"Will you tell me?"

"No. At least, not now."

"Do you know any person who is named Zenobia Zara?"

"I have never heard that combination of names before in my life."

"Out in the southeast section of the city there was a suicide discovered last evening; a young woman of about thirty, possibly a little older than that, who had killed herself with prussic acid. Mr. Conner and I discovered the body at about nine o'clock last evening. When I looked upon it I thought that I had seen the face before somewhere, but now I know that it was a slight resemblance to your own face that I recognized. The body is that of a woman who was called Zenobia Zara. She had an office in F Street where she was an instructor in some branch of learning. Are you sure that you do not know such a person?"

The prisoner hesitated a moment. Then he replied slowly:

"The name Zara is of course familiar to me, but not as a surname."

"But the woman's face resembles yours, Cashel."

"That may be a mere coincidence," Nick noticed that the man was controlling himself with an effort. "If I might see the body——"

"You shall. Now let us return to this one."

"Yes, sir."

"It is your brother, you say?"

"Yes."

"Do you still refuse to give me his full name?"

"I must."

"What shall be done about the disposition of his body?"

"I was about to refer to that, Mr. Carter. I have some money. It is in the care of the warden. I would like to have the body cremated—as Philip Cashel. And—Mr. Carter—he was a protestant. I will ask the warden to supply you with the necessary funds, if you——"

"Why are you so terribly reticent?" exclaimed the detective impatiently. "Why don't you tell me the truth about this business? Why do you compel me to work entirely in the dark when a few words from you might clear up the mystery entirely?"

Cashel stood staring before him as if he had not heard the questions. After a moment he turned and walked abruptly to the window, where he stood staring out through it, apparently forgetful of the fact that he was a prisoner.

Nick waited a moment, then followed him.

"Cashel," he said kindly, "make a clean breast of the whole thing to me, won't you? I am satisfied that you have it in your power to clear up this mystery; why don't you do it?"

"Mr. Carter"—the man turned abruptly and faced the detective—"I *want* to tell you all that there is to tell, but just now I cannot. I must wait a little longer. Bu there is one thing that I will tell you now; the rest must wait."

"Well, what is the one thing that you will tell?"

"This: The man who lies dead over there—my brother Philip, and he was my twin brother, as you may have surmised—is the one who committed the assault for which I am now serving a term in prison. It was he who had been working in the city of Chicago, under the name of Michael Cashel, and posing as a catholic while in reality he was an Orangeman. I was working all the time in Philadelphia at another branch of the same trade, for we learned it together, and our handiwork was as exactly alike as our faces and figures, our motions and gestures. Wait one moment more, please. That day at the station, when I was arrested for the assault, I had gone there to meet him in response to a telegram that he sent to me. I appeared upon the scene at the moment he escaped from it. I was arrested while Philip escaped. The good father who was attacked identified me as his assailant. You know the rest."

"Is all this that you tell me true?" demanded the detective.

"As I hope for salvation hereafter, I have spoken nothing but the truth, Mr. Carter," was the solemn reply; and Nick believed him.

"Then you were not excommunicated?" exclaimed the detective.

"No. I was never in Chicago in my life. I have never been farther west than Buffalo."

"It was your brother Philip?"

"Yes. But remember, he was not a catholic, although he was able to pose as one."

"It seems to me that he was what you might call an all-around scoundrel, Michael."

"He was. He was. And yet—he was my brother; my twin brother. I loved him despite his faults and wickedness. Let him be cremated as Philip Cashel, and as for me, I will serve out the remainder of the sentence. I am already a convict, and the remainder of my term will soon pass."

"But that is doing yourself a gross injustice, and it should not be permitted."

The convict shook his head emphatically.

"Things must remain as they are, Mr. Carter," he said. "My brother is dead; let him rest. It would be the wish of my mother, if she were living. You see, if Philip had chosen to come forward when I was arrested for his crime, as I would have done had the positions been reversed, it might all have been different."

"I don't think he was built exactly that way," said the detective grimly.

"No. And now I have been a convict two years and a half, or a trifle more."

"You chose to remain there and suffer for your brother when——"

"Perhaps at the time I was not so generous as you suppose. My first emotions were of intense anger toward my brother, but they have gradually worn away. You see, I was, in effect, taken red-handed. I stepped into view at the instant my brother escaped and was recognized by many there, or, rather, identified by them, as the assailant. I realized that it was useless to deny it. I believed that my brother would come to my rescue, but he did not."

"It was a pitiful condition, Michael."

"Yes; but there was no escape from it. I realized that thoroughly—so I kept silent."

"And your sisters—could they not have helped you to prove that you were innocent?"

"No. As I have told you, I have long been estranged from one of them. The other——"

"Well?"

"I would not permit her to say anything."

"You preferred to make a martyr of yourself."

"I was forced to become a martyr, if you like the expression."

"Don't you think, Michael, now that you have told me this much, you had better tell me the rest of the story, and clear up this mystery?"

"Not yet, Mr. Carter. Not yet. If I could see my sister—perhaps we might decide to make a confidant of you."

"Then help me to find her for you. Tell me where to look for her. You may trust me."

"I realize that, sir. I would help you to find her if I could, but I do not know where she is. The last address I had from her was the one in C Street, where you have already called. But I know that she left there several months ago."

"And this other sister—your half-sister—where is she?"

"When I replied to that question at the prison, I told you the truth. Besides, if I knew now where she could be found I would not tell you. But if I could find Zara——"

"She shall be found, Michael. I have to call you by that name because I do not know of another one to use."

"It is my name. My baptismal name is Michael Xavier; that much you may know."

"Aren't you most through over there?" asked the major with some impatience at that moment.

"Yes," replied the detective, "and with your permission, major, I would like to take Cashel now to see the body of the suicide."

CHAPTER X.

A POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION.

When the convict who was in reality innocent of all crime was taken into the room where the body of the supposed suicide was exposed to view he was outwardly as calm as he had ever been since Nick had known the man; but the detective could see plainly that his calmness was assumed, for his face had become strangely drawn and haggard since his arrival in Washington.

When he stepped forward and stood beside the body, his figure became rigid and save that his hands were clenched until the knuckles stood out white and bloodless, he showed no outward sign of emotion that the others could see.

But Nick Carter saw, for he had stepped forward, and a little to one side in order that he might do so.

He saw tears of anguish leap to the man's eyes and roll down his face.

For the space of a minute there was utter silence in the room; and then the prisoner turned abruptly and faced them all.

"Gentlemen," he said, and it was at once apparent that he spoke only with a great effort, "this is not the body of the woman who was called Zenobia Zara. This woman was my sister, two years older than I; my sister Zara, who has been known in this city as Miss Mulligan. Mr. Carter," he added, with pathetic sadness in his voice, "we have found her sooner than we believed we could, although I will confess to you that I was not entirely unprepared for it."

He turned away for a moment while the others in the room with him remained silent.

Not one of them had anticipated anything like the revelations of the morning, when Cashel was brought there; and there was not one among them who did not pity the man infinitely.

But he was bearing up bravely, and after a moment he continued:

"I know that my sister would never have taken the name of Zenobia under any circumstances—*and I know, moreover, that my sister did not kill herself.* Gentlemen, this is not a suicide; it is a murder!"

"May I ask how you know that? Why you are so positive about it?" asked the major.

"Because I know my sister."

"But she was killed by a few drops of prussic acid upon her tongue. The vial that had contained it was found almost in her grasp beside her."

"Nevertheless, she did not take it herself. It was not self-administered."

"Then who did it? Can you enlighten us as to that?"

"I believe I can, although I have nothing to substantiate the statement."

"Well?"

"She who called herself Zenobia Zara."

"Is she another relative?" The major asked his questions rapidly.

"Yes."

"What relation?"

"She is my half-sister."

Nick Carter interrupted them here.

"But you told me that you did not recognize the name, when I asked you about it," he said.

"No, sir. I told you that I had never heard that combination of names before; neither had I. Both names were familiar to me, but I had never heard them combined."

"Your half-sister, you say?" continued the major.

"Yes, sir."

"Same father, or mother?"

"Same father."

"Older or younger than yourself?"

"Five years younger."

"You say that you believe she killed this woman here? Your sister Zara?"

"I do."

"Do you know why she would have committed such a deed?"

"Incarnate hate, sir."

"Any other reason?"

"I am not prepared to say, at present."

"Why not?"

"I have been in prison two and a half years, sir. I have not seen Zenobia since long before I was sent there."

Nick realized that this was plainly an avoidance of the question, but he thought it best to say nothing at the moment.

"Do you think that Zenobia Zara might also have been instrumental in the death of your brother Philip?" pursued the major.

"I have no doubt about it at all," was the calm reply.

"Can you give us any assistance in tracing her?"

"No, sir."

"Would you do so if you could?"

"I think I would be inclined that way, sir."

"Can you give us a description of her personal appearance?"

"Not more than to say that there was a general family resemblance between her and my own sister Zara. Zenobia was always called very beautiful. Her eyes are gray, her hair almost black, her skin very white. She is very gifted and brilliant, speaks several languages fluently. She is a trifle above the medium height for a woman."

"Did you know that she lived here in this city?"

"Not positively. I suspected it."

"There must have been two persons implicated in the death of your brother. There was at least one person inside the hack with him, and there was a driver on the box of the vehicle, of course."

"Naturally, sir."

"They are equally guilty of the crime."

"Yes, sir."

"There might even have been two persons inside the hack with the victim, making three in all."

"That is quite possible."

"Could you make any suggestion as to the identity of one or two other persons who might have been with Zenobia Zara on that ride?"

"No, sir."

"You have no idea?"

"None whatever."

"Don't you know anything about her associates?"

"Not definitely."

"What do you mean by 'not definitely'?"

"That I have neither knowledge nor information sufficient to form a belief."

"Nick," said the major, turning toward the detective, "I am going to ask you and Conner to remain here in the house for a time and to search it thoroughly. You two can do it better than any one I know, and it is quite possible that something may be found here that will give us a trace of the woman. In the meantime I will have some of her pupils searched out, and find out what they can tell us."

Instead of replying directly, the detective turned toward the warden, whom he addressed.

"Will you," he asked, "permit Cashel to remain here with Conner and me if I will make myself personally responsible for his safe return to you?"

"I don't think, Carter, that I can consent to that. It is asking rather too much. I have already far exceeded my authority concerning him, and if anything should happen——"

"Nothing will happen, I assure you. I tell you right now, warden, I would not hesitate at all to put Cashel on a train alone and send him back to Moyamensing without a guard, if he promised me that he would go there."

"Thank you, Mr. Carter," murmured the prisoner; but the warden was not convinced.

It was then that Nick stepped quickly forward and drew the warden aside where they held a low-toned conversation.

"It is this way, warden," said the detective. "Cashel knows the secret of this entire mystery. Hitherto he has refused absolutely to tell it to me. A little bit ago, while we were beside the body of his brother, he assured me that if he could see his sister Zara for a moment he might be induced to tell me all he knows. Do you follow me?"

"Yes."

"The sudden discovery of his brother was something of a shock to him, as you saw; but it was nothing to this later development."

"Possibly not."

"I want you to leave him here with me because I believe that if I have him alone here, in the presence of all that remains of his sister, whom he loved, I can induce him to tell me all he knows about this complicated affair."

"But suppose he should manage to escape! Think of the position it would place me in."

"He won't even think of such a thing. I have reasons for being certain of that."

"My position wouldn't be worth a snap of your fingers. I might even find myself behind the bars in his place."

"I thoroughly realize that, and for that reason I would not make the request of you if I were not perfectly sure of my ground."

"Then there is another thing, Carter."

"Well, what is it?"

"Think what the man has been through this morning."

"I have thought about it."

"It is enough to unsettle the reason, temporarily, at least, of almost anybody."

"It is; only his is not unsettled in the least."

"He might try to do himself an injury. He might try to kill himself."

"He won't."

"And such a thing, if it happened down here, would be fully as bad for me as if he escaped. You realize that, don't you?"

"Yes. But let me tell you something. I have become so interested in this case, and in the peculiar facts that are associated with it that I have determined to go to Harrisburg as soon as I am through here, and apply to the governor in person for a pardon for this man. I believe that I will get it, too."

"Oh, say, Carter. Come now."

"Will you let the man stay here with me, on my word of honor—you know me—that I will restore him to you safe and sound as soon as we are through here?"

"I'll do it if you will permit the two guards to remain also."

"I have no objections to their keeping watch outside the house—front and rear, if you like. But really, it is unnecessary, my friend. I am as certain of my statements regarding the prisoner as of anything in the world. Do you suppose I would give my word of honor about it unless I knew what I am talking about?"

"No, I do not, Carter. Well, then, have it your own way; but I'll tell you this: There isn't another man in the world whom I would do it for. You can put that in your pipe and smoke it."

"Thank you. Thank you. I appreciate it fully."

And so when the others took their departure from the house, the convict was left there with them, unguarded, save for the presence of Conner and Nick Carter.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONVICT'S STORY.

"We will attend to the ostensible business which detains us here first," said the detective as soon as the door had closed behind the others of the party. "Do you care to assist us, Michael?"

"Yes, sir; if I may."

"Certainly you may. We will take the house room by room, I think. But first, Michael, we will leave you alone with your sister for a time while Conner and I give our attention to the parlor floor. When you are ready, come to us."

"Yes, sir. Thank you."

But when Nick and Conner reached the lower floor, instead of searching, Nick related to his friend all that Michael had told him about the arrest and imprisonment; and he told it so well and with such evident conviction of its truth that Conner was also convinced.

"I don't think there is much use of a search in this house," he concluded. "The woman who could plan and execute two such crimes as these would not be the one to leave incriminating documents lying around."

"Not unless something was forgotten or overlooked," agreed Conner.

"Oh, we will make a search and a thorough one; only I do not expect it to be prolific of results. There certainly is no receptacle in this room where things could be hidden. You might pull back the edges of the rug and look beneath, and search between the seat and the back of the sofa. In the meantime I will give my attention to that little desk in the back parlor."

Nothing was found, however.

Even the desk was barren; literally so, for there was not an article in it. It had been cleaned out of everything, and there was not so much as a scrap of paper inside it.

The dining-room of the house was in an extension, and this was also barren of results, nothing being found there save the dishes, and not many of them.

As they were in the act of leaving it to return to the upper floor, they heard Michael descending the stairs, but Nick called to him to wait where he was as they were going up; and so presently the three stood together again in the presence of the dead.

"Mr. Carter," said Michael, then, and as he spoke he reached out his left hand and rested it on the cold, white forehead of his dead sister, "I have something that I would like to tell you, if you and Mr. Conner will be good enough to listen."

"Yes, Michael," replied the detective, and he signed to Conner to be seated while he himself dropped upon a chair.

"If I have appeared unduly mysterious in my conversation with you, if I have remained silent when you thought I should speak, it has been because of a certain responsibility I felt for the safety of others; because I did not feel that I had the right to betray what I knew so long as it was not really my secret. You will understand me better as I proceed."

"Very well. Go ahead in your own way, Michael."

"I must give you a little bit of family history first, sir. It is necessary."

"Well?"

"My father deserted my mother when I was a mere child. Zara was two years older than Philip and I. We were living in Russia at the time, where my father was military attache, for he was a soldier; an officer. He had been induced to join with a group of anarchists—terrorists, they are called there. My impression is that at the time he did not care much about the anarchistic part of it, but he had become infatuated with a beautiful young Russian princess, and it was through her and because of her that he not only joined them, but shamefully deserted my mother.

"Fortunately my mother had had settled upon her at her marriage a sufficient sum to keep us from want as long as she lived. When she died, the income ceased with her. I was then, as was Philip, of course, sixteen years old; my sister eighteen.

"We came to this country. My mother could not bear the thought of returning to the vicinity of her former home. She preferred to be among strangers. We lived in Philadelphia where Philip and I learned our trade, side by side at the same bench.

"The extraordinary resemblance between my brother and myself is not so noticeable now, after his death, as it was during his life. Then, too, I have grown stouter in the prison and that has made some more difference. Formerly it was next to impossible to tell one from the other."

"I can quite believe that, Michael."

"The resemblance ceased there, however. Philip was always in mischief, and generally it was malicious mischief, at that. It was his habit, too, always to assume my name when he engaged in his escapades, so that I got the credit for his misdeeds while he was supposed to be a model of good conduct. These things I knew very little about at the time, however. By the way, I should say here that in addition to learning our trade together, we both studied telegraphy at one time. It was his wish to become an operator, and I took up the study to help him.

"Our sister acted the part of mother to us as far as she was able, after our mother's death; but she had no control over Philip, who became more incorrigible than ever, and was constantly in some sort of trouble.

"Twice I was arrested for faults he had committed, and would have been left to suffer, too, only for the intervention of my sister.

"Seven years ago, when we were twenty-three years old, my father suddenly made his appearance. He had somehow succeeded in tracing us. He brought with him the eighteen-year-old daughter of the woman for whom he had deserted my mother—Zenobia."

The detective nodded, but made no comment.

"My father appeared to have a great deal of money and jewels. He seemed to be wealthy; but he had become dissipated, or perhaps had always been so; I do not know as to that.

"I positively refused to have anything to do with him, and while I could not hold Zenobia accountable for his sins, I speedily discovered that I neither liked nor trusted her, and so I shunned her, also. Zara accepted them on sufferance, but Philip literally fell into their arms and fawned upon them.

"That was the condition of things when, after they had been with us about six months an officer appeared on the scene, my father was arrested and later extradited, after which he was taken to Russia and ultimately was sent to the mines in Siberia. He had killed the brother of Zenobia's mother in a quarrel, and afterward had robbed him of an immense sum in cash and jewels. I do not know the particulars; only the bare facts.

"Zenobia continued to live with us for two years after that. Her strange, half-wild beauty fascinated everybody but me. I continued to dislike her, because I did not trust her. Then I discovered that she was following in the footsteps of her mother, and had allied herself with a group of anarchists, and had induced Philip to do the same. Next, imagine my utter consternation, if you can, when I learned that by specious deceit the two of them had succeeded in inducing Zara to join, also.

"It is true that they entirely misrepresented the aims and purposes of the society to her; but that made no difference, once she had actually joined them. She was in possession of their secrets.

"I besought Zara to defy them all, and to withdraw; but she only cried bitterly, assuring me that it would be death for her to do so; and the result of it all was that in order to protect my sister, in order to be near her when I thought she might be in danger, in order to watch over her unceasingly, I also joined the group."

"I am beginning to understand some of the reasons for your reticence," said Nick. "You feared for the safety of your sister, while you, being in prison, were unable to watch over her."

"Precisely. Yes, sir."

"Go on, please."

"Philip had already originated the method of sending orders and messages among our own groups of anarchists, by means of the beads fashioned in the form of that string you now have in your pocket; also he had been promoted to the head of the group. Zenobia alone had more power than he, but that was personal; because of her beauty and witchery.

"I was ignorant of the fact that my father had brought a large fortune in cash and jewels to this country with him and that he had secreted it somewhere. I had supposed that all he had stolen had been spent; not so Philip, and all that time he was searching ceaselessly for it. That string of beads you have in your pocket was not the first intimation I had received that he had found the fortune the existence of which I learned only after I was imprisoned.

"When Philip suddenly left us and went to Chicago, it was for the purpose of bringing together some scattered groups of anarchists; ostensibly he went there to ply his trade. He was no sooner gone than Zenobia took active charge of the affairs of our own group, and with the result that my sister Zara was selected as the executioner of a certain condemned official of this country whose name I need not mention.

"In terror she told me about it, for I was not present at the meeting that night. I immediately sent her to Washington, to some friends of ours who lived here, advising that she take the name of Mulligan and remain in hiding until I could arrange things satisfactorily. Then I appeared at the next meeting of the group and offered myself as a substitute for her in the death-dealing plot.

"But I had no intention of carrying it out.

"Then, swiftly, one after another, things happened, until the time came when I was arrested in my brother's stead, in the Broad Street station, as I have already told you.

"After my imprisonment, Zara came to see me, as you know. She told me then of the fortune in money and jewels that our father had concealed, and which Philip had discovered; but Zenobia also knew about it, and had confided her knowledge to the other members of the group, with the result that they demanded that the entire sum be paid into the general fund of the society. Then one day Philip came to see me, having disguised himself with a wig and a false mustache so that he would not resemble me too closely. He told me about the money and jewels and said that he had persuaded Zara to take charge of them.

"Before that I had sent out several bead messages from the prison, each one to a different address, but all of them destined to reach my sister ultimately; but after his visit I made haste to manufacture others which I sent to her, beseeching her to get rid of the money and jewels at once; to give them to the group, if there was no other way, but on no account to retain possession of them.

"That, sir, was the situation as I regarded it, when you came to see me yesterday morning."

"But when I showed you this string of beads," said Nick, holding it up, "you said that you made it, but that it had been changed afterward."

"I deceived you there, Mr. Carter, because I did not wish to mention my brother's name."

"But why did you not tell me about all this anarchy business at once, Michael?"

"I was afraid. Had I been at liberty, so I could act with you, I would have told you at once. But I feared that if I told you the secrets, and you acted upon them, the group would suppose that Zara had betrayed them, and would take vengeance upon her. I understand that they knew where she was, and that she could not escape them if they chose to injure her; and more than all others, I feared the wrath and the vengeance of Zenobia."

"So now——"

"One moment, please, Mr. Carter. While you and Mr. Conner were down-stairs I made out a list of names and addresses for your use. Here it is. It contains every name and address of that group of anarchists, as I knew it two years ago; and I do not think you will find many changes. They are the murderers of my brother and sister, although I think this deed here was the work of Zenobia."

CHAPTER XII.

SOME VERY QUICK WORK.

"You think, then, that the murders were committed really to obtain possession of the stolen fortune, do you?" asked the detective.

"Yes; and to get both my brother and sister out of the way. Zenobia hated Zara; she despised Philip, as a weakling—as he undoubtedly was. That is why I loved him in spite of his faults. There is also a strange tie between twins, don't you think?"

"Yes. What is your real name, Michael?"

"O'Brien. I hope you will not use it unless it is necessary."

"No. I will not. How do you suppose your sister was induced to come here to this house, to her death?"

"By a threat, doubtless. She was in terror of Zenobia. A threat would have brought her here, running, for she was in constant fear lest she would be slain before I came out of prison."

Nick held out the string of beads that was responsible for his interest in this strange case; and he said:

"I am still in the dark about this message. Perhaps you can enlighten me."

"I think I can, sir."

"Well?"

"If you will refer to the list of names you hold in your hand you will see that the first one—the one at the top—is Sacha Vassili. He is half-Italian, half-Russian."

"Yes. What of him?"

"He is the man with whom Zenobia is, or, at least, was, in love. It was mutual. He would be the person she would send for to come here to assist her at the right moment. The name that follows—Sergius Tomschk—would be the man he would select to accompany him, if anybody."

"I see."

"He had also learned the art of putting these beads together with links in the form of a message. Since the group adopted them as a means of communication; and for forwarding positive orders, a supply is always kept on hand. A little time suffices to arrange such a message as that, and they regarded them as safe. It was not supposed that any one would ever think of them as containing or conveying a message. My idea is that Vassili made all the arrangements, by authority of the group, and then took this method of informing Zenobia of the plans at the last moment. I believe that Zara was first brought here and ordered to await the return of the others; that the money and jewels were buried somewhere out on the Cabin John road; that Philip was compelled to go with them to secure the valuables, and that as soon as they were recovered, Philip was stabbed to death, and left as he was found. After that the saddled horses were ridden to the other end of the city by the two men while Zenobia returned here where Zara was awaiting her. Doubtless she found Zara asleep on the bed, and it was a simple matter to drop the acid on her tongue, if that was the case.

"As for the wording of the message, there was an appointed place of meeting already agreed upon; that is a habit with anarchists. Time only has to be mentioned, you see, in an order. Zara was inside with Philip and Vassili when Zenobia met the carriage. She was left here at this house. The following sentence is intended to be read. 'Philip *will be* disposed of safely.' The sentence, 'Bring jewels and cash,' means 'Will bring jewels and cash back with us.' 'No turning back,' is a threat, and the remainder of the message means that if instructions are not carried out, the group will take vengeance. It is all very clear to me now."

"And now, Michael, if you were at liberty and in my place, where would you search for these people? For Zenobia, Vassili, and Tomschk?"

"I would go directly to the East Houston Street address in New York City that you will find written down on that paper, after Vassili's name. He has a café there, and he has prepared it for a hiding-place in an emergency. He would not go there if he had any idea that you would get in consultation with me, or that I would obtain immediate knowledge of what has happened. But as the case stands, I think you will find all three of them there."

Nick Carter turned instantly to his friend.

"Conner," he said, "will you hurry at once to the secret service office and use your private wire to New York?"

"You bet I will."

"Tell Captain Flynn all about it. Ask him to do us the favor to go to police headquarters and have those captures made without delay, will you?"

"Sure thing. There won't be any delay."

"And Con, after you have done that, call up Philadelphia and read off these names and addresses to your captain there. Have the whole bunch arrested as accessories before the fact. Will you attend to it for me?"

"Right away."

"You may leave Michael here with me. We will walk back to the major's office together. And say, Con!"

"Yes?"

"Ask both cities to wire me results in care of the major, as soon as results are obtained, will you?"

"Yes."

A few moments later Nick and Michael left the house together and walked slowly away.

But as they strolled along, Nick remarked:

"Michael, I shall return to Philadelphia with you to-night. I shall use what influence I possess to have you paroled in my custody, and I think I can accomplish it. After that we will return here and you can attend in person to your dead."

"Heaven bless you, sir."

"When that is all over and done with I shall take you to Harrisburg with me, and I think I can get you pardoned on the representations I shall make. Anyhow, we will try it."

"How shall I ever repay you, Mr. Carter?"

"There are some things, Michael, that cannot be paid for save in good wishes. I know you will give me those, always."

"Indeed, I will, sir."

"Let us hope for the present that there will be no mistake about rounding up those anarchists; and I don't think there will be."

"Nor I. They will be found all right, sir."

At headquarters they found the major and the warden anxiously awaiting them and in the private office of the former, Nick recounted everything that had occurred since they parted, finishing with this statement:

"And now, major, I think I have got my fingers, metaphorically speaking, already upon the murderers."

"How is that, Nick?"

"If you two gentlemen are content to sit here with me and await a telegram from New York I don't think it will be long in coming. I should suppose that Conner is already through with his talk over the phone, and by this time Flynn is on his way to headquarters in New York, while in Philadelphia the condition is about the same. In an hour from now we should get word."

"I would like to start for home as soon as possible," said the warden.

"Your first train is at three o'clock, and you can get that all right," replied the detective.

"Then I vote that we go and have some lunch in the meantime," said the major.

* * * * * * *

It was exactly an hour and a half from that time when two messages were handed to the detective, in the office of the major.

The first one proved to be from Philadelphia, and Nick read aloud:

"The twelve men arrested without trouble. All now under lock and key."

The message from New York was as follows:

"Vassili, Tomschk, and the woman Zenobia Zara lodged at headquarters awaiting further information from you."

"That is what I call rather good work," said the detective, with a smile.

"And quick work, too," remarked the major. "It's bully, Nick."

"Warden," said Nick, "I am going to Philadelphia with you this afternoon. I'll be back again to-morrow, major, so it won't be good-by."

"All right, Nick. I tell you I'm glad this mystery is solved. Say, that carriage *did* come from Baltimore, all right. It was hired there four days ago and a deposit paid on it, so the owner wouldn't have been much out, if he had lost the whole thing."

There was never, of course, any answer to the advertisement that Nick put in the *Post*, but it seemed an advisable thing to do at the time it was tried.

* * * * * * *

It only remains now to say that Nick did bring Michael back with him to Washington, to bury his dead; and also that later he was successful in interesting the governor of the Keystone State to the extent that he pardoned Michael, and set him free.

THE END.

The next number (605) will be "The Man in the Dark; or, Nick Carter's Masterly Tact."

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WINTER IN THE LIGHTHOUSES.

Winter is the time of year when life in a lighthouse is no joke. Even when the house is on the mainland, where the keeper and his family can get around somewhat as ordinary folks do, the winter is a long, hard pull.

In the United States there are about 1,700 lighthouses, built in a large variety of situations, not one of which was chosen with a view to the comfort and social advantages of the occupants. For instance, when it comes to linked loneliness long drawn out the eight families who keep the Scotch Cap and the Sarichef lights off the coast of Alaska are candidates for first prize. There are four of them at each light, but they do not see each other for months at a time.

As for seeing anybody else, a passing steamer occasionally lowers a boat and sends them mail. But as the steamer company charges Uncle Sam $50 every time it does this the lighthouse folk have to put up with rare visits.

Life on a light-ship is even worse than it is in a lighthouse. The house, at any rate, keeps fairly steady, whereas a light-ship is never absolutely still, and in stormy weather rolls and wrenches, douses and drenches its crew until they almost go crazy under the strain. The best of them can't stand too long a spell of that sort of thing.

The Diamond Shoals light-ship, thirteen miles out in the ocean off Cape Hatteras, of evil memory to mariners, was kept there once for five months instead of the three prescribed by the regulations. She was Number 71, and was waiting for Number 72 to be completed and to come out and relieve her.

The five months wound up in a mutiny. It started by the captain taking the mate to task because the latter had beguiled the weary hours by playing cards with the sailors. The mate's feelings were sensitized by his months on the light-ship and he brooded over the affair. He told the engineer and the latter sympathized.

The two finally wrought themselves to the point of calling upon the captain and informing him that he was getting stuck up, and that it made them tired. The captain promptly pulled a revolver and announced his willingness to put them out of their misery, but they got his revolver away from him and practically kept him a prisoner, the sailors taking their side, until the ship was relieved.

When they got back to port every mother's son of them except the mate deserted the ship which had so got on their nerves. They went on a glorious drunk, captain and all, and were arrested and tried. The captain's offense evidently appealed to the department as the more heinous, for he was discharged and the mate was not only forgiven for his little mutiny but was put in command of the ship.

He had shown one trait which is almost the most important in the make-up of a light-keeper. He had stuck to the job.

Even when the crew were half-distracted from the strain of their long duty, it did not occur to them to abandon their post. As a matter of fact, only three or four instances have been recorded of American keepers abandoning a light which was in their charge.

Probably when it comes to out-and-out wintry rigors some of the lighthouses on the Great Lakes suffer more even than those on the seacoast. They become coated with thick ice and have also to stand up against onslaughts of cake ice forced up out of the water and driven against them with terrific force. One lighthouse in Lake Erie had to stand on one occasion against ice which piled up against it to a height of forty feet.

But it's no summer resort in the tower of any lighthouse in winter. No heat is allowed, as that would cause a dimming of the plate-glass windows or the lenses. The heat from the great lamp is carried off by a ventilator overhead, and the turret is so cold that on the New England coast keepers say that a glass of water will quickly freeze solid if set on the window-sill.

The big lamps, by the way, are allowed to burn only four hours at a time. If they burn longer there is apt to be vaporization of the gases in the oil, diminishing the brilliance of the light. So the lamps are changed twice every night. When there is fog or storm a first-class lighthouse will keep three men busy all night tending the lights and the engine which keeps the siren whistle going.

These whistles differ from one another, just as the lights do; so that even if a vessel cannot distinguish a light it can determine its position by the whistle. For instance, if one whistle has a note eight seconds in length, coming every half-minute, another whistle may have a note five seconds in length, coming every quarter minute. No two whistles within a section where there would be the slightest chance of confusing them are alike.

Neither are any two lights alike where they might be mistaken one for the other. There are nowadays five different classes of lights: fixed, revolving, flashing, colored, and intermittent. There are some combinations of these also which provide still other variations, such as intermittent flashing lights and group flashing lights.

Oil is still the fuel used. Wherever else it may be a back-number, it keeps its lead over all other lights for steadiness and reliability in signal work.

There are some buoys which are electrically lighted and some which have Pintsch lights. There are also some light-ships which are electrically lighted. But the instability of buoys and ships is the explanation. Lighthouses stick to coal-oil.

The Cornfield Point light-ship, which was the first to carry an electric light, cost $10,000 a year to maintain. The Sandy Hook light-ship was the first to show a revolving light. An oil-burning light-ship will consume a thousand gallons of oil a year.

In 1902 there were only fifty-four of these light-ships. Last year there were ninety-three first-class ones alone, averaging 350 tons each. There were 122 vessels in the lighthouse navy.

You have little idea of the steady, hard work done by the Lighthouse Board until you count up the items of what they have accomplished. There are the 1,700 lighthouses and beacons, the 122 ships, about 2,000 post-lights on rivers, about 150 electric and gas-buoys, about 500 fog-signals, 100 whistling-buoys, 200 bell-buoys, and a thousand day or unlighted beacons.

The oldest lighthouse the United States can show is Boston light, on Brewster's Island. Boston light, as it is always called in spite of the fact that there are a good many other lights in Boston harbor, dates from 1715. The Massachusetts coast was the first to have a lighthouse, and it still leads in the number it can show. There are several times as many on and off the Massachusetts shore as there are on the whole Pacific coast. This is not a case of partiality. The New England shore is the most dangerous and, owing to the amount of shipping involved, the risks are doubly great.

This is not saying that more protection on the Pacific Coast is not needed. On the inland route to Alaska there are only thirty-five lights protecting the entire 1,000 miles. Nineteen of these are along the Canadian coast.

This does not compare very well with Japanese inland sea, where there are forty lights covering a distance of 250 miles. The Pacific Coast, however, enjoys the distinction of having some of the most famous of American lighthouses. The Tillmanook light was one of the most difficult problems American engineers ever tackled. It cost $125,000 to build and is one of the famous achievements in its line.

The pay of lighthouse-keepers averages from $100 to $1,000 a year. The isolated ones are supplied with food and fuel, too. As a matter of fact, it often costs more to get these supplies to the lighthouses than the supplies themselves cost.

Men who receive $100 a year or other small salaries do not have charge of first-class lighthouses. They are the men who attend to lighting one of the small beacons, but even so they earn their money.

Lighthouse-keepers are not allowed to take up any occupation that would interfere with their duties, but some of them manage to turn an honest penny occasionally by making shoes or doing tailoring or other intermittent work.

One is reported who preached every Sunday at a little church near the light. Another was a justice of the peace. Another taught school.

Several more or less famous men and women have spent a part of their lives at a lighthouse. Celia Thaxter, the poet, was born and brought up in the lighthouse at the Isles of Shoals. Perhaps people who have read her well-known account of "My Island Garden" do not know that the Government supplies lighthouse-keepers with all the seeds they want. In the nature of things some of them want mighty few, but the Government encourages all the beautifying possible.

One of the most alleviating features of modern lighthouse existence is the traveling libraries. These collections, numbering about forty volumes each, are provided by a philanthropic organization of women.

They are carried to the lighthouses by the tenders which change the books at any one light about twice a year. At isolated stations these libraries are worth almost their weight in gold during the long winter months.

The summer isn't so bad anywhere. On the northern Atlantic coast things go to the other extreme. Summer folks become a veritable pest at many of the lights. Those which are near the large resorts are made the objective point of hundreds of yachting parties, of launches, of idlers in any kind of a thing that will float.

When these visitors come by scores every day and must all be taken up to see the light—a very respectable little climb if the tower happens to be a hundred or more feet high—and must all be fed with the same facts—all of them indigestible to the average mind on a summer vacation—and must all peek and peer into the private quarters of the family, then the isolation of January doesn't seem to be without its redeeming features.

The wife of a lighthouse-keeper has no sinecure. One wonders what happens if a man in that position marries an untidy wife. According to the testimony of one woman who lives in a lighthouse the inspector would make short work of a domestic slattern.

"He examines every corner of the house every time he comes," said this woman. "Looks at the windows to see if they have a spot on them, lifts the kitchen drain to see if there's any grease, draws his fingers across the parlor-table to find out if there's dust, looks over the traveling library to see if we wash our hands before we touch the books, and as for anything that's made of brass—and you've no idea how many things in a lighthouse are made of brass—if it doesn't shine so that it makes him squint—well, he squints, anyhow, but it's out of his other eye, so to speak."

In spite of the loneliness of the life many women seem to like it. Some of them have even stuck to the place after the death of their husbands.

Mrs. Baker, who was the keeper of the house at Robbins Reef, off Tompkinsville, in New York Harbor, succeeded her husband there when he died. Mrs. Baker, by the way, had some brave rescues to her credit.

Another woman lighthouse-keeper was Ida Lewis, who kept the Lime Rock light at Newport, and who rescued eleven persons from drowning. In one instance a mother and daughter had charge of the same light for over fifty years.

There is no age limit in the lighthouse service. A man is not retired so long as he is able to discharge his duties. If he is forced to resign there is no provision for pensioning him.

The appointments are all made under the civil service rules, men being promoted from grade to grade in accordance with the regulations. Most of the men who go into the service along the coast have been at sea.

One of the least inviting lighthouses as a place of residence is in a Louisiana swamp. The locality is described by the officials as too soft to be land and too thick to be water. The lighthouse is needed for the guidance of vessels in the open water beyond, but its own immediate surroundings are so much like mush that when the keeper wants to get away he has to push his boat through by main force.

If there are any children living at this swamp light it is a problem just what precautions their mother could take against their falling into the mush. The wife of the keeper at Sabin's Point used to put life-preservers on her children when they were playing outside, lest they fall through the railing. But there was real water at Sabin's Point.

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